The social world of the Babylonian priest

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6

Social Boundary and Collective Identity

Introduction

In the previous chapter we looked into causations behind the interactional pattern of the priestly families in Borsippa. I have shown that the (economic) mentality sustained by this social group played an important role. As so-called rentiers, these families were first and foremost set on protecting their existing resources and preserving their traditional position in society. I argued that this motivation is best served through homophilous interaction, that is, interaction with individuals with similar lifestyles, social positions and resources. However, the analysis has remained theoretical and abstract, and interaction has been approached mainly from a structural perspective. But how was similarity or homophily assessed and maintained in this community? What were the material and symbolic resources these families claimed? What exactly constituted a Babylonian priest, and how did this specific social group correspond to and differ from other groups in society?

The points of departure are what I called the more salient features of the pattern of interaction, i.e., the areas that show the highest degree of inbreeding homophily: marriage and friendship. Leaving aside the rules of hypergamy, priests most often married daughters of fellow priests, but alliances with non-priestly clans were concluded as well to a limited extent. However, intermarriage with other (non-family-name-bearing) strata of society is thus far not attested and might for all we know have been considered undesirable. While it is not surprising that priests adhered to a strict endogamous policy in the domain of marriage – it involved nothing less than the transfer of women and property, besides having deep ramifications in terms of hierarchy and status – the fact that a very similar pattern is found in the domain of trust and intimacy is telling. To reiterate, friendship is understood as an informal

social relationship, based on choice, trust and voluntariness, and it seems only likely that in this personal matter priests enjoyed much more freedom from social convention and regulation than in any of the interactions studied above. Yet, intimate contacts came predominantly from temple-based families, while individuals from lower strata of society are entirely missing. In other words, the hypergamous marriage circuit as well as the circles of trust and intimacy of the priesthood of Borsippa comprised only individuals who boasted clan names, marking them as descendants of established ancestry and members of the urban elite. Hence, the fact that the priests' significant and most symbolic interactions took place exclusively within this restricted social group strongly suggests that they perceived of, and, maintained themselves as a discrete social unit.

I would like to argue that we are dealing with what is called a 'symbolic' or 'social boundary' in the social sciences.[745] According to Lamont and Molnár (2002), symbolic boundaries are, in general terms, 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practice and even time and space,' but can more practically also 'separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership'.[746] Only after *symbolic* boundaries 'are widely agreed upon can they take on a constraining character and pattern social interaction in important ways' and become *social* boundaries, for example translating into patterns of social exclusion or racial segregation.[747] These outcomes serve as mere examples pertaining to specific historical contexts and cannot be applied to the community under investigation. Yet, the interactional patterns in our corpus are clear in their own right. Even if individuals from the lower strata are represented in the priestly archives and are at times found in more important roles (e.g. as creditors, lessees, and landowners), they did not participate in the significant interactions of the priestly community. Not only the strongest ties, like marriage and friendship, materialised inside a restricted circle, in agricultural collaboration and silver lending too, interaction with these

[745] The idea of 'boundaries' has taken up a key position in scholarship across the social sciences since at least the mid-20th century and has become part of the standard conceptual toolkit. A good starting point into the various traditions, concepts and applications of 'symbolic/social boundaries,' are the review articles by Lamont 2001, and Lamont & Molnár 2002. Both articles include an extensive bibliography on the topic.

[746] Lamont & Molnár 2002: 168.

[747] Lamont & Molnár 2002: 168-169.

individuals was kept to an absolute minimum. It follows that priests upheld a collective attitude and agenda, which allowed them to keep control over their social environment and preserve the configuration of their community through a deliberate act of auto-segregation. I believe that the clear pattern of interaction of the priests of Borsippa justifies designating it as the more forceful type of boundary, the social boundary. This social boundary set the priests apart from the rest of society and segmented the 'us' from 'them'.

It is widely accepted among sociologists that before an objectified collective identity (the 'us') can emerge, individuals must first share a sense of togetherness and be able to differentiate themselves from others by drawing on a set of common criteria.[748] Equally important is the fact that this process of identification should be recognised by outsiders.[749] It is in the encounter between the internal and the external that identification is to be found and negotiated, and that identities materialise – it is, in the words of Fredrik Barth, the 'boundary that defines the group rather than the cultural stuff that it encloses' (1969:15).[750] In this chapter I will adopt the exact reversed approach to the topic. Having already detected a very clear boundary based on the interactional patterns of the priestly families under investigation, I will now proceed to look for the markers along which this social boundary was drawn. To rephrase the question posed above: what exactly were the symbolic and material resources on which priests drew to create and maintain their social in-group? In other words, what were the attributes and criteria, the so-called 'cultural stuff', that defined the collective social identity of the priests and their closest circles? In the following I will examine a range of these markers, including the affiliation to the temple, ownership of property, scribal education, literacy, and language.

6.1. Affiliation to the temple

6.1.1. Prebend ownership

The first feature that comes to mind is the possession of priestly titles. Ownership of prebends and, if sanctioned, the enrolment in the priesthood had prodigious effects on

[748] E.g. Barth 1969, Brubaker & Cooper 2000: 14-21, Jenkins 2008, *passim*.

[749] E.g. Jenkins 2008 (especially Ch. 4), Eriksen 2002 (especially Ch. 2-3), Barth 1969.

[750] Besides having a general application on boundaries (in the social sense), in this article Barth was especially interested in ethnic boundaries and identities.

how individuals perceived of themselves and organised their professional and private lives,[751] and can be identified as the key feature unifying the social group under investigation. The right to enter the employment of the gods was reserved for a select number of families who scrupulously transferred this privilege from father to son. They legitimised their position by insisting on continuity with the past and the preservation of hallowed traditions. Hence, the prebendary brewers from the city of Nippur all claimed the person of Absummu as eponymous ancestor, even if *de facto* they might not have shared consanguinity.[752] Other ritual specialists versed in the more arcane trades went so far as to trace their roots back to the remotest, mythical past.[753] While no direct evidence of such an ideology is found in the documents of the priesthood of Borsippa, one can assume that they shared a 'deep-rooted concern for lineage and origins' very similar to their colleagues from other cultic centres.[754] The majority of the families from Borsippa managed to maintain their cultic positions during the entire long sixth century and some were there already long before while others persisted even thereafter.[755]

[751] Waerzeggers 2010 (especially Ch. 2). A more social-economic outlook is provided by Jursa *et al.* 2010 (especially, p. 155ff.).

[752] Joannès 1992: 90 and Beaulieu 1995: 88.

[753] This idea is especially evident among ritual specialists like diviners, exorcists and cultic singers, see e.g. Borger 1973: 172, Lambert 1998: 142, Beaulieu 2007a. Note for example that a diviner (*barû*) had to be a descendant of Enmuduranki, the antediluvian king of Sippar, in order to be initiated in this trade, cf. Lambert 1998. Note that according to one tradition priests were instated by the chief god Marduk at the moment of creation, cf. Al-Rawi & George 1994: 135-139.

[754] Waerzeggers 2010: 78. See also note 337 for possible evidence that the tradition about Absummu also circulated among the brewers of Ezida. Further interest in the past (as a source of legitimation) can be deduced from the fact that monumental inscriptions (*kudurru*s) commemorating the donation of land and/or prebends to individuals, usually by the king, were kept on display in the temple even centuries after the deed, see e.g. Slanski 2000: 96f. This is for example the case for VS 1 36, a *kudurru* from the mid-eight century BCE, which describes the inauguration of a temple-enterer of Nabû in Ezida. It was found in the ruins of the temple by H. Rassam, Cf. Reade 1986. Interest in origins and history arises, moreover, from the composition of chronicles, a discipline that prospered in the Borsippean scribal circle, see Waerzeggers 2012.

[755] All of the family names mentioned in the mid-eight century *kudurru* VS 1 36 are still found in the temple during the long sixth century. On the other side of the chronological spectrum the Huṣābu family was still able to man brewers for the service of Nabû in the later Persian and Hellenistic periods (cf. colophons and texts written by Nabû-kuṣuršu//Huṣābu in CT 12; Hunger 1968: nos. 124-133).

Prebends did not (necessarily) represent the most costly asset in the property portfolio of priests,[756] but they were certainly among their most cherished ones. Even if prebendary titles could be bought and sold freely, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that priests strived to keep them firmly in the patrimony: they were hardly ever used as collateral on loans,[757] and families usually avoided bequeathing prebends to female relatives.[758] Prebends were put up for sale only in the uttermost end of needs, and even then these sales took usually took place within the paternal family and among immediate colleagues.[759] Moreover, there are many examples of priests seeking to redeem previously alienated property, a context that saw the involvement of the so-called *bīt abi*, 'house of the father'. Recent studies by, for example, C. Waerzeggers (2010: 81-90) and J. P. Nielsen (2011: 244-253) have shown that the *bīt abi* – a flexible social institution that united several agnatic lines of descent headed by the 'big brother' (*ahu rabû*), i.e. the eldest son of the eldest son of the common ancestor – exercised a great measure of control over the property decisions of its members. Most notably, it held the right to redeem alienated property, especially (albeit not exclusively) prebends. Besides a natural sense of solidarity ('brotherhood'[760]), members also shared an emotional attachment to their *bīt abi* and its patrimony.[761] This institution seems to have embodied a concrete locus[762] of togetherness and shared identity for close relatives within the wider kin groups. It

[756] BM 26576 = AH XV no. 192 from the Rē'i-alpi archive illustrates this clearly. In this enormous sale of seventeen items of property, prebends rank only third highest in terms of value in silver, well after the housing plot and agricultural land. For the relative value of types of private property, see Jursa *et al.* 2010, Ch. 3. Note however that the prices of prebends differed greatly; the prices roughly correlated with the relative status of the prebendary function in the temple hierarchy, see Pirngruber & Waerzeggers 2011. For a general comparison between the prices for houses, agricultural plots and prebends, Jursa *et al.* 2010: 176ff.

[757] See above, Ch. 3.

[758] Roth 1990: 2, 33f. and Waerzeggers 2010: 92-94.

[759] Waerzeggers 2010: 98-99.

[760] Note that the use of (fictive) kinship term 'brother' is found only in prebend related cases; sales of houses and land were not dealt with in this framework, which, following C. Waerzeggers (2010: 87), shows that blood ties were especially important for the priestly identity.

[761] Van der Toorn 1996a: 20, Waerzeggers 2010: 90, and Nielsen 2011: 244ff.

[762] Note that the *bīt-abi* could perhaps refer to a physical building, a home base, besides the more symbolic concept of ones extended family unit. The reading of the relevant texts is, however, open to criticism, cf. Nielsen 2011: 56ff., 276-280.

represented a core feature of domestic and public life of the priesthood and indeed the urban upper stratum in general.

6.1.2. Purity and initiation

The Babylonian priesthood was submitted to stringent requirements of purity well beyond the basic needs for hygiene and everyday cleanness.[763] A priest needed to be pure in all aspects of his person, which meant pure of blood, mind and body.[764] That is why before being admitted into the priesthood, cultic authorities would conduct extensive inquests into a candidate's health, past and family in order to ensure his ritual fitness. Correct descent was of primary importance. Both ritual and practical texts inform us that only a biological son of an initiated priest could enter the service of the gods.[765] In practice, this could only be ascertained if the priest-to-be had been born in wedlock. Virginity of a bride upon marriage was apparently proof enough for uncontested paternal descent of her children,[766] while birth outside of matrimony led to a candidate's disqualification. Moral behaviour represented another aspect of purity.[767] Individuals convicted of homicide or thievery, as well as those merely lacking proper devotion and humility were barred from entering the temple.[768] In case of doubt, the temple authorities would summon witnesses and consult the candidate's past (criminal) record to make sure his integrity was beyond reproach. Only someone with an impeccable record, a truly virtuous person, was qualified for cultic service.

[763] See in brief for the different concepts of purity and pollution in Babylonia, especially between cult and everyday life, Sallaberger 2006.

[764] The rules of admission in the Babylonian priesthood and the requirements of purity that existed in the Neo-Babylonian period have been discussed extensively in Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008. Cf. Waerzeggers 2010: 51-55. Löhnert 2007 has collected the Neo-Assyrian evidence. Borger 1973, Lambert 1998, and Löhnert 2010, have studied various ritual texts dealing with the initiation of Babylonian priests and ritual specialists.

[765] Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 10-13.

[766] As argued by Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008, virgin brides received pendants (*zību*) from their parents upon marriage. This pendant, thought to consist of a couch – a mark of female purity associated with the goddess Ninlil – functioned both as a symbol of virginity for the bride as well as proof of uncontested paternal descent for her children.

[767] Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 13.

[768] Waerzeggers 2010: 53.

Once correct descent and conduct had been established, and royal permission granted,[769] the candidate could be inducted into the priesthood. The initiation ritual is referred to as *gullubu*, literally 'the shave', and took place in the bathhouse the first time the successful candidate entered the sacred compounds of the temple.[770] Performed by the prebendary barber (*gallābu*) and a team of cultic experts, the primary purpose of this rite of passage was to check the candidate's physical purity and to shave his body and head. According to the ritual texts from Nippur edited by R. Borger (1973), the *nešakku* and *paššīšu* priests were required to have bodies 'as pure as golden statues' (col. I 13-14), and be free from physical imperfections such as bad eyesight, kidney-stones, birthmarks (?) and an asymmetrical face.[771] A similar standard of bodily perfection was required from other ritual specialists. The diviner (*bārû*), for example, was considered unfit for service if he had squinting eyes, chipped teeth, a cut-off finger, or suffered from a ruptured (?) testicle or leprosy.[772] Once the candidate had passed the physical examination in the bathhouse he could be cleansed and shaven, thereby ritually purified and separated from the profane.[773] The candidate had now become an initiated priest.

Even if it seems likely that all active priests had to go through some sort of rite of initiation, the act of shaving was reserved only for those priests who had to operate in the sacred areas of the temple.[774] This included the temple-enterers who came into direct contact with the divine statues as well as purveyors such as brewers, bakers, oxherds, fishermen etc., who manipulated the sacrificial foodstuff and participated in the daily ceremony on the temple courtyard.[775] While the term *gullubu* only refers to

[769] Candidates had to be granted permission from the king or his local representative before being allowed to proceed with the consecration ceremony, see Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 18-19. The king was also actively involved in the recruitments of priests himself, at least in case of more senior cultic positions. Since these priests did not only enjoy proximity to the gods but also access to the persona of the king, careful selection was a matter of national security.

[770] See on the *gullubu* ceremony Scheyhing 1998, Sallaberger & Huber Vulliet 2005: 620-22, Löhnert 2007, Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008, Löhnert 2010.

[771] Borger 1973: 172.

[772] Lambert 1998: 144.

[773] Scheyhing 1998: 73.

[774] Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 14-17.

[775] In the data sample used for the present study, the reed-workers are probably the only priests who did not belong to the consecrated (i.e. shaved) part of the temple personnel of Ezida.

the shaving ceremony at the threshold of office, it has been shown by C. Waerzeggers that these priests had to pay regular visits to the temple barber and were 'submitted to tests of cultic suitability in the course of their active careers' (Waerzeggers & Jursa 2008: 20). The demand for shaving provided a visual aspect to the temple's hierarchy, which was mirrored in the physical appearance of its personnel. It set the pure apart form the impure, the fit from the unfit. Besides that, it also distinguished the priests from the rest of the population and served as a distinctive outward sign of priestly status and identity in society.[776]

While to need to be purges from all bodily hairs was restricted to a selected group, all Babylonian priests were required to wash their body with water before being allowed access into the temple.[777] As a consequence, a priest who could no longer do the washing (*ramāka* a.meš) was immediately released from duty.[778] Hence, washing with water was an essential requirement for and thus an inherent quality of a priest on duty.[779] This association is also found in a couple of literary and monumental texts that use the term *ramku* (pl. *ramkūtu*) to designate a 'priest' or the 'priesthood' in general.[780] A good example is found in the En-nigaldi-Nanna cylinder of Nabonidus (YOS 1 45) recently edited by H. -P. Schaudig (2001: 373-377). This inscription, composed in honour of the restoration of the Egipar in Ur and the installation of

[776] For other visible marks, which may have included specific garments and headgear, see Kessler 1999: 250ff., Sallaberger & Huber Vulliet 2005: 623, and Zawadzki 2006: 91, 94. Of special interest are the so-called *ṣibtu*-garment and the *mehēzu*-girdle, which, according to the Hellenistic Uruk text UVB 15, 40 were worn by various priests engaged in temple ritual. Some ritual specialists (e.g. the lamentation priest, or *kalû*) even wore *lubāru*-garments, normally reserved for the gods. Since these articles of clothing are usually found in so-called *dullu peṣû* ('white work') texts, we can assume that the priests wore them in white too (cf. Zawadzki 2006, Bongenaar 1999: 304ff.). That the garments of the priests had to be in a spotless condition follows from the fact that they paid regular fees to the temple washerman (*ašlāku*), who, besides cleaning the dirty cloths of the gods was also responsible for washing the working cloths of his temple colleagues (cf. Waerzeggers 2010: 55). Note that priests can often be found on Neo-Babylonian seals. They are represented as bald, clean-shaven individuals, wearing a girdle and a fringed robe that passes over the right shoulder. Their right hand is usually raised towards the mouth in reverence, while sometimes carrying cultic devices in their left hand. See for the Neo-Babylonian cylinder seal and its iconography, Collon 2001: 193-195.

[777] Waerzeggers 2010: 12-13, 55.

[778] BM 26480 = AH XV: no 163.

[779] Sallaberger & Huber Vuillet 2005: 612

[780] See, CAD R: 126-127.

Nabonidus' daughter as *entu*-priestess of Sîn, also records the exemption from taxation and corvée labour granted to the local temple personnel. The long list of priests who are accorded this privilege opens with the term *ramkūtu,* the 'bathed-ones'.[781]

The priests' preoccupation with purity is also borne out by the particular diet they followed. On the one hand, they enjoyed the privilege to consume the remainders of the offerings.[782] Derived from the table of the gods, this food had been meticulously sanctified and was carefully distributed among the priesthood and the king.[783] On the other hand, priests observed dietary restrictions in order to maintain their ritual purity. Although the details largely escape us, a glimpse of this custom, relating to the priesthood of Ezida, can be found in the text SpTU III no. 58.[784] This polemic literary composition deals with the crimes and sacrileges committed by Nabû-šumu-iškun, a Chaldean king of the mid-eight century BCE. Besides appropriating temple property, introducing foreign gods, and flouting nearly every single ritual protocol, the king is said to have offered 'leek – a thing forbidden in Ezida – into the temple of Nabû' (col. ii 17-18) and made the temple-enterers eat it. The consumption of leek as well as other pungent foodstuff such as onion, garlic or fish, are known to have turned a person temporarily impure according to the Babylonian mind-set.[785] Forcing the

[781] Note that the list of priests is closed and summarized with *kiništu*, a term commonly translated as 'temple college/assembly', which may have functioned as a synonym of *ramkūtu*. That both terms were, at the least, closely related follows from TCL 9 143 (see below). In this letter, concerned with the cultic activities at the Eanna temple in Uruk, the sender tells the *kiništu* 'not to bring about any cultic interruption' and reminds them to 'wash themselves with water' (ll. 6-9). Nevertheless, *ramku* as a generic word for priests is rare and found mainly in literary contexts. We have to wait for the Hellenistic period to find it in administrative temple documents, see CAD R: 127. Here the term is clearly used as a classification to divide the consecrated from the non-consecrated temple personnel. BRM 1 99, for example, mentions rations of the '*sirāšû* ^{lú}tu$_5$.meš,' or 'bathed brewers'.

[782] Waerzeggers 2010, *passim* (especially Ch. 8).

[783] E.g. McEwan 1983, Corò 2004. See below, for more information on the relationship between the king, the priesthood and the gods.

[784] See Cole 1994b, and Glassner 2004: 300-312 for an edition of this text. This text belongs the late-Achaemenid archive of the exorcist (*āšipu*) Anu-ikṣur//Šangû-Ninurta from Uruk.

[785] E.g. van der Toorn 1985: 33ff. For injunctions against eating certain foodstuff in Babylonian hemerologies as well as medical and ritual texts, see Cole 1994b: 241. Cf. Geller 2011.

priests to eat tabooed substances, Nabû-šumu-iškun is thus being accused of having rendered the god's immediate servants unfit for service.[786]

The ideology of purity was obviously an important feature of the self-perception of Babylonian priests. Some of its aspects were transmitted from father to son, while others had to be nurtured and guarded carefully against profaning influences and miasma. Rules of purity not only regulated their activities inside the temple, but also demanded for a very specific lifestyle on the part the priests.

6.1.3. Sacrifices and festivals

Once initiated, prebendary titles gave their owners the right to perform a specific (ritual) task in the cult of the gods at a particular moment in the year. Priests did however not operate in isolation but were grouped into larger professional units.[787] In the temple a priest thus came into contact with a large body of direct and indirect colleagues who were all part of the same system and ultimately served the same goal – the worship of the gods. As I have tried to show throughout this study, collaboration and association in the temple paved the ground for much of the social interaction of priests, most of which took place within this restricted group of temple colleagues and their relatives.

One can argue that the concept of priesthood materialised on a daily basis through joint action inside and outside of the temple walls. The cultic calendar of Ezida has recently been reconstructed by C. Waerzeggers (2010: 111-152). She showed that the fundamental aspect of the cult of Ezida (like in any other Babylonian temple) was the daily worship, or, *ginû*. It consisted of two identical ceremonies – one in the morning (*šēru*) the other in the afternoon (*kīṣ umi*) – during which the priests on duty presented two consecutive meals to the gods, the main (*rabû*) and the second (*tardennu*)

[786] The similarities between the Babylonian priest and the Brahmin on the Indian sub-continent are interesting on this point. Brahmans are known to follow a very strict diet in which, especially, leek, garlic and onion have to be avoided according to the traditional Vedic scriptures (e.g. Olivelle 2000: 53-55, 407-409). On the other edge of their dietary spectrum, Brahmans officiating as priests in the temple hold the right to enjoy the remainders of the daily food offerings, and like their Babylonian counterparts consume the sanctified food of the gods (e.g. Fuller 1984: 14).

[787] For the internal organisation of the priesthoods in Ezida, see Waerzeggers 2010: Ch. 4 (brewers), Ch. 5 (bakers), Ch. 6 (butchers), and Ch. 7 (oxherds).

meal.[788] This quotidian ritual, staged within the intimate setting of the temple and concealed from the uninitiated eye, was perceived of as the essential form of worship, the continuity of which was thought to correlate directly with the well-being of the land.[789]

If the 'daily care and feeding of the gods'[790] was the most crucial aspect in the self-perception of the individual priests, the group's public image took shape during the cultic activities beyond the temple precinct. Just like in any other Babylonian town,[791] in Borsippa, too, there existed a number of public (monthly/annual) festivals.[792] During many of these events the (images of the) gods left their cellae and were taken out on a procession through the city's streets and the countryside, as they visited shrines and temples of divine relatives in Borsippa and neighbouring towns. Perhaps the most spectacular episode of the year took place during the so-called *akītu*, or, New Year festival held in Babylon in the beginning of the calendar year in the month of *Nisannu*.[793] As shown by both the ritual texts and administrative documents from Borsippa, on the fifth day of this month the god Nabû came forth from his cella in Ezida. After a procession through the streets of Borsippa Nabû took his sacred barge for the capital where he was welcomed by the Babylonian king at the Red Gate Quay and joined the public festivities of his divine father, Marduk, for the following days.[794] After numerous rituals, offerings, prayers and procession through the capital

[788] Waerzeggers 2010: 113-118, with exhaustive bibliographic references.

[789] It is therefore not surprising that the Babylonian rulers took great pride in emphasising their role as protectors and providers of the cult, cf. Waerzeggers 2011.

[790] This refers to the pioneering essay by A. L. Oppenheim 1977: 183-198, on the Babylonian temple worship.

[791] For cultic festivals in the cities of Babylon and Uruk, see e.g. Thureau-Dangin 1921, Çağirgan & Lambert 1991, Linssen 2004.

[792] Waerzeggers 2010: 119-141.

[793] Cf. Waerzeggers 2010: 119-121, including previous literature. Other public festivals in Borsippa reconstructed by Waerzeggers 2010: 129ff. include, among others, the wedding ceremony between Nabû and his consort in month I, a celebration at the temple of Nanāya Euršaba at the end of month I, the procession of Nanāya Euršaba and other gods to Babylon and Kish, and a celebration held at least three times a year at the shrine of Šamaš in the countryside.

[794] E.g. Pongratz-Leisten 1994, Zgoll 2006, Waerzeggers 2010: 119-121.

and its countryside, Nabû was to return to Borsippa on the eleventh, when he entered his cella following a reversed procession of the week before.[795]

Although our administrative documents – concerned above all with the bureaucratic control of the flow of commodities necessary for proper ritual – only tacitly inform us on the celebratory nature of festivals and the priests' public performance at such events, these aspects can to some extent be gained from the ritual (prescriptive) texts from first millennium Babylon and Uruk.[796] Paraded through the processional street on divine chariots or going up and down river on sacred barges, the statues of the gods, fully adorned with jewellery and dressed in magnificent garments, were the absolute centres of attention in the eyes of the spectators.[797] Though not nearly as richly decorated as the divine statues, the large priestly retinue that accompanied the gods on procession and assisted them at various other stages of these festivals must have been not less conspicuous. Besides their proximity to the gods, and at the New Year festival also to the king, the onlooker must have had no difficulties identifying them as servants of the gods, as their immaculate priestly garments and their ritually shaved bodies clearly indicated. Hence, it was these public festivals that staged the dramatic interactions between the priesthood, the gods, the king, and the wider public, the intensity and sensation of which can perhaps best be understood in the light of similar festivals held on the Indian sub-continent today.[798]

At this point a few words should be said about the relation between the king and the priests, who, after all, were closely tied together through their joint worship of the gods.[799] Rather than the ideal of the warrior-king promoted by the Assyrian predecessors, the most persistent theme of Neo-Babylonian kingship was that of the pious king as benefactor of the gods.[800] The renovation of temples, the provision of the regular sacrifice, and the supply of new cultic objects are heavily emphasised in royal inscriptions.[801] The epithets or short titles used most frequently by the Neo-

[795] Waerzeggers 2010: 120-130.

[796] E.g. Farber 1987, Çağirgan & Lambert 1991, Linssen 2004.

[797] Pongratz-Leisten 1994.

[798] E.g. Younger 1980, Fuller 1984: 17-21, Fuller & Logan 1985, Good 1999, Fuller 2004,

[799] This relationship is the subject of a very stimulating article by C. Waerzeggers 2011, where most of the following information can be found in extenso.

[800] Waerzeggers 2011: 726-730.

[801] Waerzeggers 2011: 726-727.

Babylonian kings express a similar generosity towards the gods and their cults: 'the one who establishes the regular offerings' (*mukīn sattukkī*), 'the giver of wonderful gifts' (*mušarrih igisê*), and the most popular, 'the provider of Esangila and Ezida' (*zānin Esagila u Ezida*).[802]

According to the royal ideology that was current in first millennium Babylonia, the gods directly appointed individual kings.[803] As the earthly representative of Marduk and the divine assembly, the king was thus invested with supreme religious authority. This meant that besides the allocation of resources necessary for cultic execution, the king had to keep a close check on the priesthood itself. Hence, it was a royal prerogative to endow temples with new cultic personnel as well as to remove incompetent priests from office or suspend their posts, even though this could not be done without good reason.[804] Despite being formally enrolled in the service of the gods, the privileged position of the priests rested, strictly speaking, upon the good grace of the king.

Even if the idiom of the royal ideology left little space for the mention of priests, their role was of crucial importance to the king. While he owned prebendary rights in the temple,[805] the Babylonian king did not have the authority to officiate as a cultic agent, not even to enter the presence of the divine statues unchecked.[806] As we have seen, it was the priests who looked after the care and feeding of the gods and performed the crucial daily temple ritual. Even if the king could offer a sacrifice to the gods, only the priest could operate it. Hence, the king had to rely on the interceding figure of the priest in order to interact with the gods.[807] Once more, this

[802] Da Riva 2008: 94-107.

[803] Dietrich & Dietrich 1998.

[804] Waerzeggers 2011: 741-745.

[805] Kleber 2008: 287-292.

[806] Waerzeggers 2011: 733-737.

[807] The similarities with the caste system of the Indian sub-continent are striking on this point. The king, traditionally a member of the so-called Kshatriya class, enjoyed supremacy in absolute (political and military) terms, yet he was deprived of any sacerdotal function, which was the right of the priestly or Brahmin caste alone. While the king claimed political power (and even retained some magico-religious aspects) the Hindu priests held spiritual authority. This gave rise to a very similar triangular exchange relationship between king, priest and god observed in first millennium Babylonia: the Brahmins relied on the king for his protection and patronage in order to conduct proper ritual, while the king in turn depended on the Brahmins in order to communicate with the gods

triangular relationship between the king, the priesthood and the gods materialised most clearly during the New Year festival.

Held in honour of Marduk's sovereignty over the universe, the New Year festival staged a crucial episode during which the king's legitimacy as the gods' representative on earth was being ritually tested. Once all the gods had been assembled in the Esagila temple on the fifth day, the king would enter the sacred compound of Marduk. There, well hidden from the public gaze, he was met by the *ahu rabû*, literally, 'big brother' of Esagila and the first among the priests, who stripped the king of his royal insignia – sceptre, loop, mace, and the crown of kingship – which he placed in front of Marduk.[808] Upon return, the high priest first slapped the king across the face, who was then escorted into the inner sanctuary, pulled by the ears and forced into submission before the statue of Marduk.[809] In this humble position, the king would avow that he had not neglected the gods, nor forsaken his responsibilities toward the city of Babylon, its people and its main temple.[810] Once the king had made his 'negative confession,' the high priests returned the royal insignia to him, after which the latter was slapped one final time, now in order to induce an omen: 'if his (the king's) tears flow, Bēl (i.e. Marduk) is well disposed, if his tears do not flow, Bēl is angry'.[811] Manipulating the royal insignia and escorting the humiliated king, somewhat violently, in and out of the divine space the role of the high priest is absolutely indispensible in this episode. Even if the kings derived their legitimacy from the gods, 'this relationship was negotiated through the

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and validate his kingship. Moreover, just like in Babylonia, in India too this complicated relationship is reflected upon in various native literary compositions. For a brief survey of the traditional notion of kingship in India and the relation between the king and the priestly caste, see Fuller 1984: 104-106 and Dumont 1970: appendix C. Readers are referred to Dirks 1987 and Peabody 2003 for more thorough studies focusing on kingship and the role of the king in pre-colonial Indian society. For a collection of essays, dealing with the traditional or ideological position and authority of the Brahmin priests and the king, see Heesterman 1985.

[808] Note that Sallaberger & Schmidt 2012 interpret this scene differently. They argue that this ritual does not involve the insignia of the king but the divine insignia of Marduk, which were being presented in front of the king and present when the latter made his confession.

[809] Pongratz-Leisten 1994.

[810] Pongratz-Leisten 1997.

[811] Linssen 2004: 232.

temple and the priesthoods, who played a vital role in validating the power of the individual kings' (Waerzeggers 2011: 746).

Besides this dramatic annual confrontation, the relationship between god, king and priest was also cultivated on a daily basis in the temples. Both king and priest were entitled to a portion of the divine meals and as such it was customary that every temple sent sacrificial leftovers to the palace.[812] By sharing food the three parties were thus joined in an exclusive unit of commensality. This special bond was further underlined by the cult of the royal image.[813] Although the evidence pertaining to the long sixth century Babylonia is in short supply, the cult of the royal image is well known from earlier periods as it had been performed in Mesopotamian temples since at least the third millennium BCE.[814] Statues of the kings were erected in temple courtyards and inner sanctuaries. This allowed the king to be in the presence of the divine and enabled a continuous transmission of worship to the gods. At the same time, these statues also received offerings, which made them into a subject of worship themselves.[815] The placement of royal images in the temple thus benefitted both sides: it allowed the kings a place in the sacred space, but also served 'to reinforce the privileges of the priest through his access to the sculpted images of both god *and* king'.[816] Their association to god and king was of great importance to the self-image of the priests and many of the literary works found in temple libraries and priestly archives focus exactly on this triangular relationship.[817]

While public festivals allowed priests to display their privileged status under the most dramatic and pompous circumstances, there must have been many more (formal and informal) occasions during which they could broadcast their ritual status and collective identity to the outside world. One example concerns temple building projects. Besides the (Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian) kings, the priests, too, are known to have been responsible for the renovation and construction of various parts

[812] McEwan 1983, Beaulieu 1990, Kleber 2008: 292ff.

[813] Cole & Machinist 1998: xiii.

[814] Kleber 2008: 269-271 (Eanna, Uruk), Waerzeggers 2014c (Ebabbar, Sippar).

[815] Kleber 2008: 271-275, Waerzeggers 2014c.

[816] Waerzeggers 2011: 745.

[817] Waerzeggers 2011, *passim*.

of the temple area.[818] The best-known example is found in the archives of Borsippa's priests and pertains to construction work on Ezida's riverside wall during the reigns of Neriglissar and Nabonidus. This dossier tells us that the priestly divisions of Ezida contributed to the realisation of this project, specifically by manufacturing and supplying bricks.[819] Replicating the cultic organisation of the temple worship, various priestly divisions (including the temple-enterers, butchers, and oxherds) received a lump sum of silver from the temple treasury to produce bricks for the allotted section of the temple wall. [820] Although undoubtedly prestigious, according to C. Waerzeggers, participation in this and similar projects was not an entirely voluntary act on the side of the priests. The brick impost caused enormous financial setbacks for the families concerned, whom we find settling brick-related debts still many years after the inception of the building project.[821] It is also dubious whether the priests engaged in the actual physical work themselves.[822] In spite of all this, it is hard to imagine that the priests would have missed the opportunity to broadcast their individual pious contributions and the beneficial role of their professional group to the outside world.[823]

[818] For references to royal construction works at the Ezida temple and Borsippa, see e.g. Langdon 1912: Nbk nos. 11, 15 and 44 (Nebuchadnezzar); Schaudig 1995, Schaudig 2001: 395-397, and VS 6 65 (Nabonidus); Kuhrt & Sherwin-White 1991 (Antiochus I).

[819] These texts have been examined by Waerzeggers 2010: 337-345.

[820] The clearest example pertains to the prebendary oxherds, who knew a dual organisation: the top level based on the trimestral rotation of the oxherd's temple service (the *bēl-agurri* level), and the lower level based on length-units of 50 cm, the responsibility over which was assigned to individual priests or a group of oxherds belonging to these three rota (the *bēl-ammati* level).

[821] Waerzeggers 2010: 344-345. The settlements of debts forced many priests to dispose of valuable (prebendary) property.

[822] In fact BM 26479 = AH XV no. 139: 4 mentions 'the workers of the house of the oxherds' (érin.meš *šá* é ^{lú}sipa.gud.meš), which might suggests that the priests hired a work gang to do the actual work.

[823] Note that there is an interesting parallel in Nehemiah 3: 1-32, reporting on the renovation of Jerusalem's damaged gates and walls. This passage gives a list of all the people who participated in the renovation work and assigns them very specific areas of construction. The result is that the entire fortification work of the city was divided in clearly identifiable units assigned to specific individuals, households, and/or professional groups. Priests figure prominently among this last set of contributors.

6.1.4. Representation

An important platform for priests to act as a collective within the community was the so-called *kiništu,* commonly translated in the secondary literature as 'temple assembly'. This was a legal body composed of the principal prebendaries of a temple organisation.[824] While the term is hardly found in the private texts of Borsippa's priests,[825] it is more commonly attested in the institutional archives of the Ebabbar temple in Sippar and the Eanna temple in Uruk. Besides the basic cultic responsibilities of the members of the *kiništu* themselves (some texts indicate that the term *kiništu* could more generically mean 'prebendaries'[826]), it functioned as an advisory board that assisted the higher temple authorities in legal matters, often related to (stolen) temple property, correct cultic procedure and taxation.[827] But the *kiništu* also operated as an investigatory panel, which collected information about (historical) conflicts, inquired about persons' backgrounds, interrogated offenders, dispatched messengers and produced adequate reports on behalf of the authorities. And finally the *kiništu* was also invested with the power to represent the local temple (community) in imperial matters. As such it was sent abroad to perform (or supervise) corvée work in Elam on behalf of the religious institution,[828] and it stood in direct

[824] The most extensive treatment of the *kiništu* is still found in Bongenaar 1997: 150-153. It seems that the brewers, the bakers and the butchers were particularly associated with *kiništu*, while the temple-enterers were traditionally set apart. Note that in Uruk we sometimes find non-prebendary temple personnel subsumed under *kiništu*. YOS 6 77 and TCL 13 182 both mention the *rab-būli* ('overseer of the herds'), a high official in the temple's sheep herding organisation.

[825] Besides a reference in the eighth century *kudurru* VS 1 36, the term is found on only three other occasions in the Borsippa corpus. BM 29400 = AH XV no. 78 (Dar 05[?]) BM 96231 = AH XV no. 83 (Dar 09), and BM 96226 = AH XV no. 79 (d.l.) belong to the Bēliya'u archive and mention the *kiništu* in relation to the preparation of corvée work in Elam.

[826] Take for example the letter TCL 9 143, which states that the *kiništu* should not cause any interruptions in the regular service of days 2, 5, and 15 and reminds them to cleanse themselves with water (*ramāku*).

[827] See for Uruk: PTS 2097 (Nbn 01), YOS 6 77 (Nbn 04), AnOr 8 48 (Cyr 05), YOS 7 128 (Cam 02), TCL 13 182 (Dar 02); Sippar: CT 55 110 (Nbn 09) and BM 61344 (Nbn 14); Akkad: BM 61522 (Cyr 04[+]), Smith Coll. 111 (Dar 04); Babylon/Dilbat: AO 2569 (Dar II 08).

[828] BM 29400 = AH XV no. 78 (Dar 05[?]) BM 96231 = AH XV no. 83 (Dar 09), and BM 96226 = AH XV no. 79 (d.l.) from the Bēliya'u archive deal with the preparations and compensation of an individual who will go to Elam with the *kiništu* and perform (supervise?) the corvée work on behalf of the prebendary bakers.

communication with the king;[829] in some instances the temple assembly might even have represented the city at large.[830] In conclusion, the *kiništu* allowed for the multifarious priesthoods of a temple to amalgamate into a single legal body representing the temple institution and exercising considerable juridical control in addition to, or perhaps in tandem with, other more inclusive civic constituencies in the community.[831] Much is still unknown about the exact composition and role of the *kiništu* and its development over the first millennium, and an in-depth investigation is still outstanding.

6.1.5. Priestly families vs. the individual priest

In the previous pages, I have shown various examples of how the ownership of prebends and enrolment in the priesthood was crucial in shaping the identity of priests and their families. Yet, a note of caution should be voiced here once again: belonging to a priestly family did not automatically turn an individual into an initiated servant of the gods. In addition to the ownership of a prebend, a candidate needed to be declared ritually fit, before being allowed into the priesthood. Not many will have been able to meet these stringent requirements, so that perhaps most individuals, indeed entire branches, of families will have had to make a living in other sectors of society. Good examples of this are the Gallābus of Borsippa and the Egibis of Babylon.[832] Yet, there is evidence to suggest that some of the privileged (sacerdotal) status was also ascribed to and upheld by clan members who were not active priests themselves. The existence of the *bīt-abi* is a case in point. This flexible social institution incorporated

[829] In YOS 6 71//YOS 6 72 (Nbn 09) the king inquires with the *kiništu* about a ritual garment; BM 113249 (Cam 03) tells us about a royal demand to the *kiništu* to inform the royal messenger about royal stelae and inscription set up in the Eanna by previous kings; YOS 3 6 (d.l, probably Nbn) is a royal request to have an audience with 10 or 15 elders and/or members of the *kiništu* at the royal court in Babylon.

[830] This is for example suggested by the Assyrian royal letter ND 2348. Here we find king Tiglath-pileser III (744-724 BCE) urging the 'temple-enterers, the *kiništu*, and the leaders of the […] (and?) the citizens of Babylon' to take military action and seize the gates of the town of Hirdasu (see, Luukko 2012: no. 1: ll. 2-5)

[831] For other civic institutions in first millennium Babylonia like the elders (*šībūtu*), the assembly (*puhru*), the foremost (*ašaredūtu*), and the citizens (*mār-banî*), and their potential juridical and prosopographical overlap with the temple assembly, see Barjamovic 2004.

[832] Jursa 2005: 65-66, 82-83.

several agnatic lines and united both male and female members into a social unit,[833] which, besides maintaining a cooperative property policy, shared a sense of solidarity, emotional attachment, and collective identity, regardless of the fact whether one was enrolled in the priesthood or not. Once more, a cautious parallel could be drawn with the Brahmin of the Indian sub-continent. Although traditionally responsible for the religious rituals of the temple and thus supposed to officiate as cultic agents and meet the liturgical needs in society,[834] throughout history Brahmins are known to have taken on many different professions. While this could and did have an effect on the prestige and social standing of the individual Brahmin it never subverted his or her absolute status in the overall caste system, as this was determined at birth.[835]

6.2. Ownership of property

As we have seen in previous chapters, besides prebends, also housing plots and agricultural land featured prominently in the property portfolios of priestly families. Even though for pre-industrial societies this has remained under-theorised and understudied,[836] it is commonly accepted that ownership of real estate has played a crucial and pervasive factor in elite and class formation throughout history. This assumption can be backed by a large number of ancient and modern examples: from the senatorial rank in the Roman Republic and the medieval nobility to the capitalist class of Marxist theory.[837] Not surprisingly the ownership of urban and landed property played an equally important role for the priestly families under investigation and should be seen as a fundamental building block of their collective identity. J. P. Nielsen (2011: 16-17, 276-280), following Levi-Strauss' theoretical model of the 'house society', settles on a particularly acute dependency of the family identity on the paternal estate (*bīt abi*), which consisted of, among other things, real estate, and

[833] For the role of women in the *bīt-abi*, see Van der Toorn 1996a: 20ff.

[834] Dumont 1970: 66-72.

[835] E.g. Béteille 2010: 112-113, Fuller 1984, *passim*, Dumont 1970, *passim*.

[836] The lack is especially striking in anthropological scholarship, where it applies in fact to elite studies in general. Reasons that have been advanced for this gap range from practical obstacles and the historical conventions of the discipline itself, to personal preferences of anthropologists who tend on the whole to sympathise with marginal and/or pre-modern (equalitarian) communities (Gusterson 2001: 4417ff.).

[837] For a concise theoretical overview of various aristocratic groups (especially in pre-modern Europe), see Mączak 2001.

whose preservation was all-important. He even points to some examples in which the ownership of a specific type of physical property seems to have prompted individuals to 'claim more permanent identities in the form of family names' (see more on this below).[838]

6.2.1. Residential property

There is no doubt that the priestly families and their close contacts all had their main residences in Borsippa. This was their most important piece of property and could be of exceptional monetary value.[839] However, much more important than the (passive) economic value of urban property, was the symbolic, social and emotional significance that it conveyed upon the inhabitants. While already millennia-old by the time of the Neo-Babylonian period, the ideological dichotomy between sedentism and pastoralism, between civilised town-dweller and barbaric nomad,[840] was still very much alive in the psyche of the urban upper stratum as it was being transmitted through the literary canon of the scribal education and its devastating consequences witnessed even in their recent past: according to chronicle ABC 24, a scholarly product of the Borsippean priesthood,[841] king Erība-Marduk (ca. 770s BCE) expelled the traditionally nomadic people of the Arameans 'who had taken by murder and insurrection the fields of the inhabitants of Babylon and Borsippa' (Grayson 1975: 182-183; ABC 24, rev. 9-13). Not only did life within city walls protect someone from such marauders, attacking armies or other unearthly forces, there can in fact be little doubt that for the urban Babylonians the only civilised mode of life was city-life. It was not for nothing that the gods had chosen cities to establish their primary dwellings on earth.

Babylonian cities in the first millennium BCE were still to a large extent – if not always in terms of *Realpolitik*, then at least on an ideologically level – self-governed by a number of (overlapping) civic institutions, which held the right to enforce a legal

[838] Nielsen 2011: 292, see pages 74-78, for his clearest example of this.

[839] For a good example readers are referred to BM 26576 = AH XV no. 192 from the Rē'i-alpi archive. Among the many pieces of property that are being sold, the housing plot is by far the most expensive one, raising no less than 26 minas of silver. Cf. Jursa *et al.* 2010: 169-172, with some general considerations on the use and value of Babylonian houses.

[840] Van de Mieroop 1997: 42-62.

[841] Waerzeggers 2012.

order upon its local population – even if the king remained the ultimate authority.[842] The sources make it abundantly clear that living in cities inspired a sense of communal affiliation that differed from the notion of kinship, the primary mode of identification, and prevailed over (ethnic, social, professional etc.) diversity to unite the citizens, that is the city as a whole, on the basis of political identity and local belonging.[843] It stands to reason that living in town, if not the actual ownership of a town house, must have facilitated admittance into this socio-political entity and enabled the resident to enjoy its communal rights and privileges.[844]

Our understanding of how residence relates to Babylonian family structure in the first millennium is still poor, as a more generalising study that would integrate both the archaeological evidence and the material culture with the textual evidence is still outstanding.[845] There was apparently both great variation in the size of dwellings and a multiplicity of possible household or residence scenarios.[846] Yet, there is no doubt that the household did form the fundamental unit of organisation in Babylonian society. Typically an urban household would have consisted of a nuclear family of

[842] For the various civic institutions in first millennium Babylonia, see Barjamovic 2004. See for the he local administration in the Babylonian towns and the centralising power of the monarchy, Jursa 2014b: 130-131.

[843] Barjamovic 2004: 49ff. The high frequency of demonyms in the Assyrian state correspondence (i.e. *Barsipaya* = Borsippean(s), *Urukaya* = Urukean(s)) and the kinship terminology in this respect (i.e. citizens would term themselves 'son' (*māru*) of a city), shows that affiliation to a city was a defining marker in the way this urban population identified itself and was identified by outsiders.

[844] Note, however, that this picture is somewhat complicated by the fact that people, while living in another town, could still uphold their traditional political/residential identity generations after migration. This was clearly the case in Neo-Babylonian Uruk, where one hears of two separate entities: the 'Babylonians' and 'Urukeans'. The group of the 'Babylonians' consisted indeed of families that migrated south from the capital to Uruk, and monopolised important posts in the religious institution until the early reign of Xerxes (Kessler 2004). Similar dynamics can be found in other Babylonian town, cf. Jursa *et al.* 2010: 136-137, Waerzeggers 2014.

[845] This and related issues will be tackled in a forthcoming study of H. D. Baker [*forthcoming* (b)], on the urban landscape in first millennium Babylonia. For available studies on Neo-Babylonian housing readers are referred to other articles by this author, including Baker 2004: 47ff., Baker 2007, Baker 2010, Baker 2014, and Baker 2015. See Baker [*forthcoming* (a)] for the study of first millennium houses and urbanism from a theoretical point of view, and Miglus 1999: 307-314, for an archaeological catalogue.

[846] See Baker 2014 for a concise overview of house size in the first millennium.

circa five individuals,[847] that is, a married couple with a number of unmarried children, but it could be supplemented by the presence of a widowed parent or sister, slaves, and tenants. H. D. Baker (2014: 14-15) has argued that instances of adult sons living with their fathers were not all that common in Neo-Babylonian society, as they would have established their own household elsewhere upon marriage. The same stands for brothers sharing the same house. At the death of the head of family, the oldest son would receive the principal or paternal home, sometimes referred to as *bītu rabû*, or big house.

For the outside world these 'big' houses must have served as a clear indicator of wealth and status. However, for the owners and their families themselves this property might actually have been much more important from a symbolic point of view. The archaeological record tells us that in the Neo-Babylonian period it was still common practice to bury relatives under the floor of the house.[848] While certainly not all inhabitants of a city could have been buried in this way, it stands to reason that this custom was preserved among elites like priests, who owned their own housing plots and held traditions in high regard. A proper burial was of paramount importance for the ghost of the deceased to enter the underworld. Failing to observe formal funerary rites, for whatever reason, could cause the ghost of king and slave alike to wander the face of the earth and torment the living.[849] An intramural burial was a good way to guarantee an undisturbed final resting place. This practice was, certainly in earlier times, closely linked to ancestral worship. Deceased ancestors received funerary offerings, known as *kispu*.[850] This ritual, held at regular intervals under the responsibility of the head of the family, involved the offering of food and drinks (facilitated through pipes in the floor), which served to ease the lives of the dead in the netherworld. This domestic ritual represented the central moment of contact between the dead and the living, and forged a direct link between past and present. Even though the textual evidence for the existence of the *kispu* or other forms of

[847] Baker 2014. However, a glimpse at the genealogical tables in Waerzeggers 2010:731-743 shows that some of the priestly families from Borsippa could be substantially larger, e.g. both Marduk-šumu-ibni//Ilia (A) and Rēmūt-Nabû//Rē'i-alpi are known to have had at least five (grown-up) children.

[848] Potts 1997: 230-235, Van de Mieroop 1997: 83, Baker 1995: 218f., Boehmer *et al.* 1995: 34ff.

[849] E.g. Schwemer 2011: 430ff, Scurlock 2006, Frahm 1999.

[850] Tsukimoto 1985, van der Toorn 1996a: 42-65, van der Toorn 1996b.

ancestor worship during the Neo-Babylonian period comes in very short supply,[851] it is hard to believe that priests who identified themselves through illustrious ancestral family names and showed a deep concern for lineage and origins otherwise, would have failed to pay homage to their departed forefathers. Whether there existed a formal ritual or not, the fact remains that with the burying of relatives within the residence, the emotional value of the paternal house must have increased enormously among the family. It changed the house from an ordinary residential area into the locus of a collective identity, as it anchored the family's history into the very foundations of its structures.

Besides the ancestral cult, the Babylonian house might also have accommodated an altar or shrine of a personal or family god. This form of domestic worship has been studied by van der Toorn (1996a: 66-150), drawing predominantly on second millennium evidence. Indeed, house chapels and rooms with altars that have been

[851] Tsukimoto 1985: 118-124, Baker 2011: 547. Two texts are of particular interest here. The first piece of evidence comes in the form of a curse formula found on BE 8 4 (San Nicolò 1951: no. 44), a fragmentary tablet from the city of Nippur dated to the second year of king Aššur-ētel-ilāni (ca. 629/28 BCE): 'Whoever breaks this agreement', the curse says, 'may Šamaš, the judge of heaven and earth, deprive him from a son who would libate water (*nāq mê*) for him and may his dead spirit (*eṭemmu*) in the […] of the netherworld be robbed of *kispu*' (BE 8 4: Rev. ll. 4-6). The reference to the *kispu* in this private administrative document indicates, at the very least, that ordinary citizens still honoured this tradition. The second text that mentions *kispu* is the [f]Adad-guppi stele. This inscription recently re-edited by Schaudig 2001: 500-513, was found in the city of Harrān and purportedly written by [f]Adad-guppi, priestess of the god Sîn and mother of king Nabonidus. In this (fictive) autobiography, [f]Adad-guppi tells us that she was born during the reign of the Assyrian king Assurbanipal and lived for nearly a hundred years. Having thus survived all the eminent kings of the Neo-Babylonian dynasty and being of an extremely pious disposition, [f]Adad-guppi declares that it was left to her alone to carry out the offerings for the deceased monarchs in the following words: 'monthly, incessantly, in my good garments I brought them oxen, rams, bread, premium beer, wine, oil, honey and garden fruits of all sorts as *kispu*' (Schaudig 2001: 507-508.). Needless to say, this inscription cannot be taken at face value as it served a very specific political purpose, i.e. to bolster her son's right to rule as king of Babylon. It is doubtful whether [f]Adad-guppi had actually carried out the *kispu* rituals, as this did certainly not belong to the conventional duties required from a priestess. Yet the message is clear. Having carried out the *kispu* rituals for the former kings, [f]Adad-guppi had assumed the responsibilities that conventionally fell to the first-born son, thus making herself and by extension her son a suitable candidate, if not the rightful heir to the Babylonian throne – and, indeed, the Assyrian Empire (Tsukimoto 1985: 122-123).

identified as the loci of such worship in earlier periods,[852] are entirely absent from the Neo-Babylonian archaeological record.[853] While this might indicate changes in popular religion, there are some indications that suggest that domestic veneration still existed in the period under investigation. One such a tiny piece of evidence comes from Borsippa. BM 96331 (Dar 30) is an administrative document from the Bēliya'u archive dealing with the return of two items that were being held as collateral (*maškanu*) for a loan. The first item was a stand for vats (*šidattu,* note that this item was also used in the cult, cf. CAD Š/II: 402-403), the second a *ṣibtu*-garment of the goddess Ninlil (^{túg}*ṣibtu ša* ^{d}*Ninlil*). While it is not inconceivable that a priest could have manipulated temple property for their own ends, it is perhaps more likely that the divine garment (and perhaps the *šidattu* too) belonged to the cultic paraphernalia of a domestic shrine of the debtor's family – however, this remains purely speculative. Still, whether or not specific rooms existed in the house that functioned as area of worship in the form of a chapel with altar, Babylonian houses will have hosted a variegated series of rituals that involved the nuclear and extended family, if not involving the veneration of a domestic god, than at least in the form of *rites de passage* like the birth of a child, the marriage of a daughter, and the death of a parent.

A final aspect I would like to mention with respect to the ownership of urban property concerns neighbourhoods. Beyond the mud-brick walls that accommodated domestic life stretched a network of streets, passages and back alleys that linked neighbouring houses into larger residential units. Scholars have often classified these neighbourhoods as socially mixed units, hosting large as well as small houses of rich and poor alike.[854] While this seems to have been the case for various periods of Mesopotamian history, H. D. Baker suggests that this was not always the case in the first millennium city as 'certain classes of society resided in separate districts' (2011: 543-544). Drawing especially on evidence from Uruk and Babylon, she points to the fact that the residential areas surrounding the temples were inhabited mainly by (middle-ranking) temple personnel, whose houses also show a much greater degree of

[852] Postgate 1992: 99-101.

[853] Baker 2011: 547.

[854] See e.g. Stone 1987 for a study of two neighbourhoods in second millennium Nippur. For a more concise survey readers are referred to Stone 2007, with some comparisons to neighbourhoods dating to the Islamic era.

homogeneity in terms of size.[855] This trend seems to have persisted into the Hellenistic period.[856]

Baker's idea might find support in the evidence from Borsippa examined in previous chapters. Priests' circles of intimacy were composed exclusively of individuals from the urban upper stratum, the majority of whom belonged to priestly families. In light of the frequency at which such individuals occur in the archives (especially as witnesses and scribes) one might suggest that there was at least some overlap between the circles of intimacy and the neighbourhood network, as trust as well as physical proximity might have been deciding factors to someone's presence at a business recording.[857] Living in town – that is, owning a house – served the inhabitant in more ways than providing shelter, status, political affiliation and family identity. Besides the prestige of living in an elegant part of town, it gave access to an extensive social network of neighbours, among whom confidants, business partners, and friends could be found. There is no doubt that these neighbourhood connections inspired solidarity among its residents who besides paying a communal tax (*dīku ša bābti*, 'levy of the city warden'[858]) must have shared many more responsibilities and concerns.

6.2.2. Landed property

This type of property was a key attribute of priestly families, forming the traditional counterpart to their prebendary titles.[859] As opposed to houses,[860] landholdings

[855] This trend towards homogeneity of house size has also been noted by Miglus 1999: 206.

[856] Baker 2011: 554. This issue will be dealt with more extensively by Baker [*forthcoming* (b)].

[857] See Ch. 4.2. and Ch. 5.1., above. The clearest case comes from the Bēliya'u archive. The most frequently attested contact was Bēl-ēṭir//Šigûa (more than forty times) who, besides his recurring involvement as scribe, witness, and business partner, also lived next to Šaddinnu//Bēliya'u. While there is plenty of evidence on housing in the Borsippa corpus, there are two obstacles that hinder the study of neighbourhood networks. Firstly, the crucial information on neighbours is usually rendered in an abridged form, omitting full filiation, as this was only of secondary importance to the contract and known to the parties anyway. Secondly, the available information usually deals with secondary houses that were rented out. As a consequence, we are badly informed about the main residence of the archive owners.

[858] See for this tax Jursa & Waerzeggers 2009: 251-252.

[859] This is borne out by some of the royal grants (*kudurru*s) from the early first millennium, that show that the beneficiary received land, in addition to the prebendary title, cf. van Driel 2002: 74-75.

represented the main income-producing asset. It allowed these families to live a (relatively) luxurious life, and bought them the necessary time and money to enter the less lucrative service of the gods, or to invest in cultural capital through scribal education, and participate in local politics and decision-making.[861]

While this remains to be proven, in the light of other ancient and (pre-)modern agricultural societies landownership might well have been a necessary condition for elite membership and political participation in Babylonia.[862] Land did surely invest the owner with status and (social) power, not in the least in terms of patron-client-relationships. Following a social-scientific understanding, the phenomenon commonly known as patronage or clientelism 'involves asymmetric but mutually beneficial, open-ended transactions based on the differential control by individuals or groups over the access and flow of resources in stratified societies'.[863] We have seen previously that all of Borsippa's priests owned at least one, but more often a couple of agricultural plots in the countryside. This allowed them to provide selective access to the landed resource they controlled. Being preoccupied with running their affairs in

[860] I.e. people did invest in houses, but unless they owned several of them, they generally did not use them to generate wealth, cf. Jursa *et al.* 2010: 169-172. There are of course exceptions also among priestly families, a case at hand being Šaddinnu//Bēliya'u who ran a housing business in town, cf. Jursa 2005: 81-82.

[861] A recent analysis of household income in first millennium Babylonia suggests that the yearly income of Borsippa's priestly families ranged from three to thirty times subsistence requirements, cf. Jursa *et al.* 2010: 296-305.

[862] E.g. Barjamovic 2004: 68-69, Jursa *et al.* 2010: 57-58. This could be the case for the social/legal group referred to as *mār-banê*. This term has often been translated as 'free man' or 'fully fledged citizen' (as opposed to unfree slaves etc.), though some contexts indicate a more specific elevated status favouring a rendering as 'notable' (Jursa 2005: 9-10, 15). In general it seems that the term *mār-banê* refers to the politically active citizenry (Barjamovic 2004: 77ff.). It is noteworthy that in some contexts, landownership and *mār-banê* status are coupled: BM 102319 (Dar 05), BM 96309 (Dar 09?) BM 29487 (Dar 12), BM 28954 (Dar [x]), BM 29020 (Xer 02), VS 5 137 ([-]). All these texts are cultivation contracts stipulating that if the tenant neglects his work and does not cultivate the land under his responsibility, he will have to compensate the owner 'according to the yield of the neighbour,' that is, 'in accordance with two *mār-banê*s' ('*akī itû šibšu akī ša 2 mār-banê ... immidūšu*,' in date cultivation contracts, or '*iṣṣid*' in barley cultivation contracts). Should this perhaps be understood as 'like two *mār-banês* (read: gentlemen) they will impose (a penalty) upon him', i.e. they will come to a gentlemen's agreement?

[863] See Roniger 2001 for a concise overview of the different ideas and traditions of patron-client-relationships in the social sciences.

town, priests hired (at times socially and economically weaker) tenants to cultivate and protect their gardens.[864] In other words, landownership allowed priestly (and other landed) families to employ individuals into their service – individuals, who in return for a relatively modest remuneration (i.e. material security),[865] had to provide the landowner with their material and human resources. I have demonstrated earlier that these contractual relationships between landlord and tenant, or, more appropriately between patron and client, could be very stable and sometimes maintained across generations.[866] To what extent this clientele could be mobilised for political purposes or how it contributed to the patrons' prestige is an issue that will have to await future investigation.

Landed property was economically and socially important and therefore highly valued by the priestly families under investigation. Individuals were clearly reluctant to sell their land, as the goal was to pass it on to the next generation (see Ch. 2.1.5). In numerous cases it can be shown that sellers only disposed of their property as a result of economical hardship and indebtedness.[867] That this property was not only important to the individual owner, but contributed to the status and identity of the wider family follows from the various manifestations of the *bīt-abi* in matters of landownership.[868] As observed by J. Nielsen, there existed a correlation between ownership of specific property and the desire among the upper-stratum families to claim more permanent identities.[869] A highly interesting case is preserved on the diorite stone tablet known as BBSt 28.[870] This commemorative inscription, dated to the ninth century BCE, records the grant of land by king Nabû-apla-iddin to a temple-enterer and namesake called Nabû-apla-iddin/Abunāya/Aqar-Nabû. This document is interesting for two specific reasons. Firstly, there is the reference to the *bīt-abi.* The priest Nabû-apla-iddin claims that this land belonged to his paternal estate (*eqil bīt-*

[864] While the evidence shows that our priests usually handed the management of their property over to individuals from within their social (family name bearing) stratum, it is likely that they in turn hired tenants from lower strata to do the actual physical work (see above, Ch. 2.3).

[865] See van Driel 1988: 132-133, van Driel 1990: 241ff., Jursa 1995: 126, Jursa *et al.* 2010: 367, 431ff.

[866] Similar dynamics of patron and client must have existed in the domain of house letting.

[867] See for an impressive list of such cases Wunsch 1999: 397-398^{+14}.

[868] See e.g. Wunsch 2003: no. 40, no. 42, and no. 44.

[869] Nielsen 2011: 292.

[870] King 1912: 104-106, Paulus 2014: 644-646. The following discussion can be found more extensively in Nielsen 2011: 75-78.

ab[*ia*…], l. 4), and appeals to the king, rather dramatically, to grant him this land so that his paternal house may not fall into oblivion (*šarru lirīmannima bīt-abia ana ṣīti la uṣṣi*, Rev. ll. 1-3). Secondly, there is Nabû-apla-iddin's filiation. In the long sixth century BCE both Abunāya and Aqar-Nabû are known as family names, especially in the region of Borsippa; the question is whether this was already the case at the time of BBSt 28. Aqar-Nabû might already have functioned as family name; Nabû-apla-iddin is primarily referred to as 'son (*māru*) of Abunāya', whereas the owner of a neighbouring plot was identified as Nabû-šaqû-ina-māti 'son (*māru*) of Aqar-Nabû'. It is thus possible to take Aqar-Nabû either as family name or as the name of Nabû-apla-iddin's actual grandfather (Nabû-šaqû-ina-māti then being his uncle), and Abunāya as the name of his father that happens to coincide with a (later known) family name. Yet, Nielsen (2011: 78) raises the interesting question, whether the case at hand might not actually point to a segmentation of lineages and the (subsequent) emergence of the family name Abunāya based on the ownership of a concrete piece of property. This proceeds from the fact that on the one hand, both Aqar-Nabû and Abunāya as family names are geographically restricted to Borsippa (and to a lesser extent Babylon and Sippar),[871] and on the other hand, and to my mind more compelling, that the property (re)claimed by Nabû-apla-iddin in BBSt 28 is referred to as *bīt Abunāya* (Rev. l. 15). The identity of this property as *bīt Abunāya* would have prompted heirs in subsequent generations to identify themselves as descendants of Abunāya, thus resulting in the use of the patronymic Abunāya as a family name.

This nominal connection between family name and landed property was certainly not an alien concept to the Borsippeans of the long sixth century, who used it specifically in relation to their *hanšû* ('fifties') lands. As I showed in Ch. 2.1, this land came into being through royal land allotment schemes in the early first millennium BCE. The principal beneficiaries of these grants were urban elite families, whose loyalty the kings thereby wished to secure. Unlike other types of land usually identified on the basis of its geographic features alone, *hanšû* land in Borsippa was typically identified by the family name of the original beneficiary clan, i.e. *hanšû ša bīt Ea-ilūtu-bani* and *hanšû ša bīt Gallābu* – thus very much reminiscent of *bīt Abunāya* in BBSt 28.[872] This nominal connection between property and family was

[871] Wunsch 2014.

[872] Note that the existence of a *hanšû ša bīt Abunāya* in the Babylon-Borsippa region, see Appendix 2.

obviously very strong as the land retained its denomination even after it was lost to the original family. This accorded the families with a sense of permanence and antiquity, and, more importantly, it projected their identity on specific properties allowed them to lay claims to specific shares in the territory of their city, a territory that was carved-up between the temple, the crown and the wider elite population.

Landed property was thus of great importance to the priestly families under investigation. It was the cornerstone of their subsistence strategy and it accorded them prestige as well as social and political power. Landownership also provided families with a platform to broadcast their collective identity, which was being anchored firmly in the landscape of their native country. The importance of this property and their rightful claim to it was not overlooked by the Borsippean elites, who recorded it in their national history. I have already mentioned the passage from ABC 24 above. This chronicle, written within the 'academic' milieu of Borsippa, recalls the loss and subsequent restoration of land to the citizens of Babylon and Borsippa.[873] It is interesting to note that the issue of landownership did make it explicitly into official history writing while for example prebends did not.[874]

In conclusion, it should be remembered that the ownership of houses as well as land was not a prerogative of the priestly families alone. There is ample evidence of other, both higher and lower strata, individuals owning real estate. On the other hand, as a result of targeted royal interventions, ownership of *hanšû* land in Borsippa seems to have been reserved, at least traditionally, for the highest stratum of society. This domain held the concerns of the paternal houses of both priestly and non-priestly families, who sought to strengthen their collective identity and claim continuity with their shared past by forging a durable nominal bond between families and their property.

6.3. Literacy and scribal education

The income that priestly families drew from their landholdings and to a lesser extent from their prebendary duties was not only invested in real estate and other (material) property. Being part of the wealthier strata of Babylonian local society these *rentier*

[873] See above and Grayson 1975: no. 24.

[874] Perhaps the walls of Borsippa and the Ezida simply did their work in defending the city from outside invasion, thus allowing the cult to continue uninterruptedly since time immemorial, that is, without interruptions of a degree worth mentioning.

families accrued enough annual revenue to be able to invest in cultural capital too, namely in the form of a scribal education. The Neo- (and Late-)Babylonian scribal education has recently been studied by P. Gesche (2000), based on the large corpus of 'school texts' now housed in the British Museum.[875] Following differences in text genre and tablet shape she was able to distinguish different levels of scribal training.[876] The necessary first step for a student was to familiarise himself with the scribe's tool (stylus) and the writing medium (clay tablet),[877] before he could start his 'first grade' training and learn the fundaments of writing by copying extracts from lexical texts and other similar lists. While the student continued working on this genre during his 'second grade', the curriculum now also involved reproducing letters, contracts, colophons, proverbs, mathematical exercises and literary compositions. The last category included such texts as the Epic of Gilgameš, the Epic of Creation (*Enūma Eliš*), and the Topographical Description of Babylon (*Tintir = Babylon*), and is of special importance as it was through these compositions that the fundamental values of Babylonian (high) culture were being activated and transmitted most clearly among the literati.[878] At this stage the student had acquired a general working knowledge of the scribal art and its textual genres and could read and write cuneiform for his personal use.[879] However, this was not the end of Babylonian scribal education and some students continued with what Gesche calls the *Fachausbildungen*. In this final stage, certainly not pursued by all, students received a more advanced and specialised training, instructing them in the arts of ritual specialists like that of the exorcists, astronomers or diviners, or preparing them for a career in civic administration as notary scribe or accountant.[880] The student, having spent most of his teen years perfecting his writing, was now a professional scribe, thoroughly skilled in the native Babylonian cuneiform lore.

[875] For the criteria used to identify a 'school text', see Gesche 2000: 55-57.

[876] Gesche 2000: 44-52.

[877] For the writing stylus and the methods used to make a proper clay tablet, see most recently Taylor 2011: 5ff. As it turns out fashioning a decent tablet was not as easy as it sounds.

[878] Gesche 2000: 149-152. For the figure of the Babylonian king and the dissemination of the royal ideology in the scribal curriculum, see Beaulieu 2007b: 140-148.

[879] Gesche 2000: 61-169, 211f.

[880] Gesche 2000: 213-218.

Many school texts discussed by Gesche have been found inside temples. While this suggests that these religious institutions provided for the formal scribal training of presumably the young priests-to-be, the evidence can at least in part be interpreted differently. Some of these school texts bear colophons (perhaps better understood as votive inscriptions) stating that they were dedicated in a *rite-de-passage*-like act by the student to Nabû, the Babylonian god of writing and patron deity of scribes. The inscription on these specially manufactured tablets usually consisted of a prayer to the god, followed by wishes for the well-being of the student and his family.[881] Accordingly, one of the largest batches of school texts known from Neo-Babylonian times – almost all of them originally bore colophons – was dug up in the Nabû-ša-hare ('Nabû of accounts') temple in Babylon.[882]

Other evidence suggests that scribal education took place privately as well, that is, within the family from father to son. The clearest example comes from the archive of the Šangû-Šamaš (A) family from Sippar, dating between the sixth and early fifth centuries BCE, published by M. Jursa (1999).[883] The Šangû-Šamaš was a prominent priestly family, which besides various shares in the service of the brewers, bakers and butchers of Šamaš also owned a prestigious temple-enterer prebend. Together with the circa two hundred private administrative tablets published by Jursa, some seventy magico-medical texts have been found (Finkel 2000), suggesting that members of the family also functioned as exorcists (*āšipu*) and healers (*asû*). In both 'parts' of the archive, M. Jursa and I. Finkel independently found traces of on-going scribal training: this idea is based, among other things, on the high number of duplicates, unusual orthography, spelling mistakes, sloppy handwriting, and the unmistakable fact that some of the medical texts were purportedly written on dictation (*ana pî šaṭir)*.[884] While this presents clear evidence for scribal training at home, these private texts do differ somewhat from the standardised school texts studied by P. Gesche in both contents and format, suggesting that we might be dealing with a different kind of

[881] Gesche 2000: 153-166. For more on the contents of these dedicated school exercise and their social and religious context, see Veldhuis 2013 (with previous literature).

[882] See e.g. Robson 2011: 560 and Cavigneaux 1981 for the publication of this collection, consisting of some 130 texts.

[883] For a brief overview of this archive, see Jursa 2005: 127-128.

[884] Jursa 1999: 12-31, Finkel 2000.

education in this archive, e.g. after school training. A more systematic (museological) investigation of the presence of school texts in private archives is still outstanding.[885]

Be that as it may, this observation is significant for the topic currently under examination, as it sheds light on a new dimension of family life and identity formation. If it is true that the scribal education in Neo-Babylonian times took place within the family, that is, transmitted from father to son, it follows that the concern of the paternal house did not only apply to real estate and prebendary titles. It was equally responsible for the preservation and transmission of scribal knowledge and the central concepts, symbols and values of Babylonian culture (i.e. cultural capital) from one generation to the next. The paternal house could thus be identified as the primary locus at which the new generation (during its formative years) was being submitted to and instilled with a very specific cultural identity that had been upheld among family members since time immemorial. In this light, the colophon on the dedicated school text of young Bēl-erība is self-evident and his concerns easily understandable: he asks the god Nabû for 'the preservation of his offspring, the preservation of his house and the preservation of his paternal house (*bīt-abi*) – that the foundations of his house and that of his paternal house (*bīt-abi*) may remain firm'.[886]

But who exactly enjoyed a scribal education and how widespread was (cuneiform) literacy in these communities? Even if this is a conundrum in modern times still, M. Jursa (2011: 191) postulated in a recent article that literacy in first millennium temple communities was certainly not only reserved for high administrators, temple clerks and ritual specialists, like temple-enterers, cultic singers, exorcists – for whom reading and writing must have been a professional necessity – but common among the lower 'purveying' priesthoods too. In fact most of the evidence we have for literacy among priests concerns prebendary families from this last group. Based on a survey of the available priestly family archives, Jursa informs us that for twenty-four of the thirty-five (well-preserved) archives there is evidence that at least one of the chief protagonists is explicitly attested as scribe.[887] This implies that more than two-thirds

[885] Note, however, that the *āšipu* archives of Uruk (e.g. Iqīša) are usually explained as resulting from training as well as professional activities, see e.g. Clancier 2014, Clancier 2009: 81-101.

[886] Frahm 1995, ll. 11-12: gi nunuz-*šú* gi é-*šú* gi é [(^{lú})]ad-*šú kun-nu* suhuš-*šú kun-nu* suhuš é ^{lú}ad-*šú*.

[887] Jursa 2011: 191.

of the priestly families were literate.[888] Moreover, the fact that it is uncommon for an archive to contain documents written by the archive holder himself suggest that this figure represents only a minimum. For a further number of archive holders literacy can be assumed based on their occupation (e.g. that of governor) or on the presence of literary ('library') texts found together with their administrative documents. We can be 'virtually certain', according to M. Jursa (2011: 191), 'that many, if not most of the first millennium priests could read and write'.

Even if most of the documentation we have on first millennium Babylonian socio-economic history was produced by temple communities, which can be identified as the locus in which continuation, elaboration, and transmission of Babylonian religio-intellectual culture was guaranteed until the final stages of cuneiform writing in the first century CE,[889] priests did not have a monopoly on literacy. This transpires in the first place from cuneiform archives of non-priestly families who filed their business transactions and wrote their letters in cuneiform, the most extensive one being the Egibi family archive from Babylon, whose *raison d'être* would be moot if not pointless were the archive holders unable to read and write. A similar picture of a more dispersed (less exclusive) literacy can be drawn from taking a brief glimpse at the scribes attested in the Borsippa corpus itself. Of the circa 4,600 individuals mentioned in the archive sample of the Ea-ilūtu-bani, Gallābu, Ilia and Rē'i-alpi families, some 700 individuals (ca. 15 %) are attested as scribe. Even if this number is obviously lower than argued above – no doubt a reflection of the fact that scribes commonly figure as one out of about six participants to a contract and a result of the practice by Babylonians to rely on a selected number of scribes (see Ch. 4.2) – the filiation of the scribes clearly shows that advanced literacy was achieved by priestly families as well as non-priestly families, even if the latter are fewer in quantitative terms. Besides a handful of scribes who did not bear tripartite filiation at all, the latter group includes families like Babāya, Barihi, Banê-ša-ilia, Hulamišu, Iddināya, Iššakku, Maqartu, Nikkāya, Nūr-Sîn, Pappāya, Purkullu, Pūṣu, Raksu, Ša-haṭṭu-ēreš, Ṣillāya, Šabrû, Zērūtu. While we came across some of these families in earlier

[888] On the different levels of literacy during the third and second millennium BCE, see e.g. Veldhuis 2011. Private archives such as the Nappāhu and Sîn-ilī archives from Babylon reveal the activities of scribes who seem to have dropped out of scribal training on a relatively low level, e.g. Baker 2004: 16-17.

[889] See e.g. Beaulieu 2006, Beaulieu 2007a, Clancier 2011, Robson 2011.

chapters, others have left next to no trace in the documentation at hand and it should be clear that their primary locus of activity was not the temple institution.

While writing was becoming more available to lower strata of society in first millennium Babylonia,[890] much of day-to-day business in the suburbs and certainly in the countryside will not have necessitated written documentation, and in any event, many might have favoured the Aramaic script and language.[891] In Neo-Babylonian society, one can therefore speak of a (highly) restricted spread of literacy. Besides, mastering the art of cuneiform was time-consuming and it can be taken as a given that this pursuit was largely reserved for those who commanded enough money and time. Cuneiform writing was very much a traditional urban affair, at a time when Aramaic was becoming increasingly prevalent.[892] While Aramaic was becoming the dominant vernacular in Babylonia and the principal language of empire (especially under Persian rule, Kuhrt 2014), it did not supplant the use of local languages. The cuneiform script continued to be favoured in Neo-Babylonian temples and their communities.[893] Owing to the use of perishable material like papyrus and leather, it must be said that the chances of recovering Aramaic administration are gravely diminished, but even so it is very likely that the families under investigation were no strangers to speaking, reading, and probably writing it. Still, so far the Borsippa corpus has not revealed any Aramaic endorsements, the absence of which points to a deliberate preference for cuneiform if not a rejection of the Aramaic alphabetic script.[894]

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[890] Jursa *et al.* 2010: 265-266.

[891] Note, however, the use of cuneiform in the community of Neirabians (Dhorme 1928, and Tolini [*forthcoming*]) and similar foreign communities like the Judeans from Āl-Yāhūdu (Pearce & Wunsch 2014). It is questionable whether these minorities could actually read the texts or whether they were simply kept by virtue of for instance their enduring legal importance. Evidence from Āl-Yāhūdu suggests that at least some individuals kept cuneiform records without actually being able to decipher them (C. Wunsch, personal communication). There are a few other archives that stem from a rural rather than city background, Jursa 2005: 149-151.

[892] Jursa 2014a, Beaulieu 2006.

[893] Jursa 2011.

[894] These Aramaic dockets are short summarising captions in Aramaic incised or inked on cuneiform tablets from first millennium Assyria and Babylonia. The contents, geographical spread and social implications of these dockets are the subject of a Leiden-based PhD thesis by R. Sonnevelt. Note, however, that BM 25636, a text rendering an alphabet in cuneiform script, and which, judging from

In conclusion, it should be clear that the ability to read and write Babylonian cuneiform was not reserved for priests and their families alone; the wider urban elite shared the same cultural values and adhered to the same scribal traditions. Non-priestly families produced scribes and kept cuneiform archives like their priestly counterparts. This is not to say that everyone was equally literate. However, one can assume that the majority of the elite families will have aspired to functional literacy, meaning that they had a rudimentary knowledge of cuneiform and were able to read a debt note and write their names, etc. Even if there is no proof that literacy was a precondition to integrate and operate in Neo-Babylonian high society, being at least functionally literate not only meant that a person was much less at the mercy of middlemen in terms of business and communication, but it must also have opened doors to more prestigious civic functions and public roles. For well-to-do families it can only have been a wise and desirable investment to provide their heirs with at least a rudimentary knowledge of cuneiform. The transmission of scribal knowledge presumably within the paternal house should be seen as an important means for these Babylonian families to pass on their cultural and professional identity to the next generation. Moreover, participation in this cuneiform culture not only nurtured a distinct *esprit de corps* based on a set of common norms and values, but also represented a vehicle through which the urban elite families were able to reproduce and consolidate their dominant and privileged position in society for the better part of the first millennium BCE.

6.4. Language

Berossus, the Babylonian priest of Marduk who wrote a historical account of his native culture and its age-old traditions for the new Greek audience in the beginning of the third century BCE, recounts that 'in Babylonia there was a large number of people of different ethnic origins who had settled Chaldea [i.e. Babylonia]'.[895] While he projects this situation back into primeval times we can take it as a reflection of the

its presence in the 98-2-16 collection belongs to the Borsippa corpus (Waerzeggers 2005: 349), might indicate that local priests did engage with Aramaic, be it, perhaps, on a more intellectual level. For an edition of this text, see Geller 1997/2000.

[895] Verbrugghe & Wickersham 1996: 44. For a very recent re-evaluation of Berossus and his work known only through references of later historians, see the Groningen based PhD thesis by De Breucker 2012, in Dutch.

ethno-linguistic reality of the Late-Babylonian period. A very similar image is evoked in Genesis 11: 1-9, where the blasphemous construction of the Tower of Babel lead to the universal *confusio linguarum*. This episode in the Hebrew Bible was no doubt a reaction to the superabundance of different languages the Judeans encountered in first millennium Babylonia. Anyone entering the ancient capital of Babylon must have been welcomed with a veritable cacophony of languages including Babylonian, Aramaic, Egyptian, Arabic, and perhaps even some learned Sumerian, mixed up with the tongues of various deportees from distant areas such as Judea, Phoenicia, Lydia, Ionia among many others.[896] This mixed linguistic bag can only have expanded with the conquest by Cyrus the Great in 539 and the establishment of the Persian Empire. In short, the linguistic landscape in Babylonian society of the first millennium can safely be described as highly diverse.

Yet, the diversity of both population and language is not reflected faithfully in the existing documentation, which pertains largely to the urban upper strata of society. This has often led to a somewhat skewed representation of the Babylonian state as being governed by the interaction and negotiation between the monarchy and the old Babylonian towns, thereby leaving a highly influential third entity out of the equation: the Chaldean and Aramean groups.[897] During the late second and early first millennium Mesopotamia witnessed a massive influx of Arameans and Chaldeans from the West (i.e. Syria and beyond), who gradually infiltrated into the region and colonised the rural areas, according to the communis opinio.[898] It is thought that the former settled mainly in North and along the Tigris in the East, whereas the latter could be found along the Euphrates from Babylon down to the Persian Gulf, effectively taking control of the countryside of the Babylonian heartland.[899] Important for the present topic is that according to the (traditional) onomastic evidence, both peoples were Aramaic speaking, thereby complicating the linguistic landscape of the region.[900]

Once settled, these groups could not easily be brushed aside. Between the ninth

[896] E.g. Beaulieu 2006: 193, Dandamaev 2004. Zadok 2003c.

[897] Jursa 2014a: 96ff., Beaulieu 2013a, Beaulieu 2006: 194-197, Barjamovic 2004, *passim*, and Frame 1992: 36-48.

[898] Lipiński 2000: 409ff.

[899] Lipiński 2000: 216ff., Beaulieu 2013a and Beaulieu 2006: 194-197.

[900] Lipiński 2000: 216-224, Beaulieu 2006: 194-197.

and seventh centuries BCE the Chaldean armies formed the spearhead of resistance to Assyrian rule, compromising repeated attempts to incorporate Babylonia firmly in the imperial framework.[901] Moreover, Chaldean leaders like Erība-Marduk and Marduk-apla-iddin II, who occupied the Babylonian throne during the eight century, plainly demonstrated their successful bid for power. While we lose track of these entities almost completely with the collapse of the Assyrian empire and the abandonment of its invaluable state archives, there are indications that they were still wielding significant political or, at least, military power in the subsequent Neo-Babylonian period.[902] The most striking testimony is the so-called *Hofkalender*.[903] This text, appended to a building inscription dated to the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar II (598 BCE.), lists the chief dignitaries of the state, who had contributed to the construction of the palace. The list can be divided into the court officials, governors of Babylonian cities and territories in the alluvium, and vassal rulers of subjugated provinces in the West.[904] As has been highlighted most recently by Beaulieu (2013: 33-35), among the second group referred to as the 'territorial leaders of the land of Akkad [i.e. Babylonia]' (*rabûtu ša māt Akkadi*) one finds at least four (and probably more) leaders of Chaldean and Aramean groups, showing that these entities still played an important role in Babylonian state politics.[905] However, more than just a secondary factor of power, there is increasing evidence that the Neo-Babylonian kings themselves all had a Chaldean or Aramaic background – from Nabopolassar and his supposed connection with the Chaldean people of Dakūru, and the usurper king Neriglissar, son of the leader of the Aramean Puqūdus, down to the last king Nabonidus, who, rather than being a native Babylonian had his origins in the region of Harrān through the maternal line and was presumably of Aramean stock, too.[906]

This brief sketch of the Aramean and Chaldean presence in Mesopotamia is of importance for the present topic as it helps us understand the complex dynamics of

[901] Brinkman 1968: 260ff., Frame 1992: 36-48.

[902] For occasional references in the late Babylonian sources see, e.g. Abraham 2004: no. 88, Beaulieu 2013a.

[903] For an edition of the text, see Unger 1931: 284-285, Beaulieu 2002: 99-101 and Beaulieu 2013a: 34. Cf. Jursa 2010b.

[904] See for this list of officials, Jursa 2010b: 78-91.

[905] See also Jursa 2014b: 127-130.

[906] Jursa 2014a: 96-97, Jursa 2014b: 131-133, Jursa 2007b, Beaulieu 2006: 200.

the linguistic landscape of the long sixth century. It was as a result of the gradual infiltration of these people (besides massive deportations) that Assyria was starting to 'Aramaicise' since at least the ninth century BCE, leading to the adoption of Aramaic in the eight and seventh centuries as the second administrative language in the empire.[907] Styling itself as the natural successor of the Assyrian empire, the Neo-Babylonian state administration was undoubtedly also bilingual, a practice that was not only facilitated by the high presence of Arameans and Chaldeans in Babylonia and the 'ethnic' background of its kings, but was further encouraged by the continuous influx of Aramaic-speaking deportees from especially the Levantine corridor.[908] While it has been suggested that both the Assyrian and Babylonian states contributed much to the spread of a standardised form of Aramaic (dating between the seventh–third centuries BCE and known as Imperial or Official Aramaic), this process was accelerated with the establishment of the Persian Empire in 539 BCE.[909] Having adopted Aramaic as *the* language of administration and imperial correspondence, the Persian rulers paved the way for Aramaic to disseminate at unprecedented speed within Babylonia and beyond, and to become the *lingua franca* from Bactria in the East to Egypt in the West.[910] It is generally assumed that Aramaic was now also becoming the dominant vernacular in Mesopotamia, if this had not happened already before.[911] Yet, being written on perishable material the Aramaic documentation from Babylonia has all but disappeared. The only traces left are a relatively small number of Aramaic endorsements on cuneiform tablets and the attestation of the so-called 'parchment-' or 'alphabetic-' i.e. 'Aramaic-scribe' (*sepīru*) in the documentation. It is thus practically impossible to evaluate the prevalence of Aramaic in this society and very difficult to trace its development and interaction vis-à-vis the local Babylonian language.

The vernacular language in Mesopotamia since at least the beginning of the second millennium BCE was Akkadian, an East-Semitic language that branched off into two main dialects, which are known as Assyrian and Babylonian according to their geographic distribution. Having gone through various stages of development in the

[907] E.g. Beaulieu 2006: 188, Nissinen 2014, Radner 2014: 83-86.

[908] E.g. Dandamaev 2004, Jursa 2014a, Streck 2014.

[909] Folmer 2011, Folmer 2012, Kuhrt 2014.

[910] E.g. Beaulieu 2006: 201-206, Kuhrt 2014.

[911] Beaulieu 2006.

course of the millennia, the Akkadian rendered in the cuneiform documents of Borsippa's priests from the long sixth century is commonly referred to by Assyriologists as Neo- or Late-Babylonian.[912] In the light of the linguistic diversity and especially the increasing spread of Aramaic pictured above, Assyriologists traditionally relegated these language phases into the 'limbo of spät-und-schlecht'.[913] The frequent occurrence of complicated orthography, frozen forms, incorrect morphology, and corrupt syntax were taken as signs of the general decline of spoken Babylonian, which would gradually have been turning into a hybrid-language.[914] Indeed some scholars even doubted whether (Late-)Babylonian was still a spoken language at all, recognising it merely as a '*Schrift- und Gelehrtensprache*' (much like Latin in medieval times) while the population spoke Aramaic.[915] In a recent reassessment of the evidence, J. Hackl has challenged this idea and argued for a much longer existence of Babylonian as a living vernacular.[916] Concentrating primarily on the letter corpus from the eight until the first centuries BCE – a genre that allowed for more freedom from formulaic conventions of the legal documents and presumably written in a language that comes closest to the actual spoken vernacular – Hackl detects various complex linguistic innovations which can best be explained as having taken place in a spoken environment, and propelled by the influence of native speakers. Moreover, quite the opposite from being an Aramaeo-Babylonian *Mischprache*, recent scholarship has refuted much of the previously assumed influence of Aramaic on Babylonian, which displays a rather remarkable resilience to its contact language.[917] The question of when exactly Babylonian stopped being a spoken language and continued merely as a grapholect remains unresolved. Nevertheless, knowing the end result, one fact remains indisputable – Babylonian as a

[912] E.g. Hackl [*forthcoming* (a)]. The term 'Neo-Babylonian' usually refers to the Babylonian dialects found in the documents from the Neo-Assyrian period (i.e. until ca. 626 BCE), whereas 'Late-Babylonian' is applied to the Akkadian found in the (administrative) documents dating to the Neo-Babylonian empire until the disappearance of cuneiform in the first century of our era (ca. 626 BCE – 75 CE). However, this classification is based on historical events rather than linguistic development and Hackl [*forthcoming* (a)] rightly criticises it as 'largely arbitrary'.

[913] Oppenheim 1967: 43.

[914] Hackl [*forthcoming* (a)], Beaulieu 2013b: 360-362.

[915] Von Soden 1995: §2.

[916] Hackl [*forthcoming* (a)]. See also Hackl 2007: 149-150.

[917] E.g. Abraham & Sokoloff 2011, Beaulieu 2013b, Hackl [*forthcoming* (a)].

spoken language was on the wane, gradually losing ground to Aramaic, which seems to have become the vernacular of Iraq at the turn of the millennium.[918]

Be that as it may, Babylonian was undoubtedly still spoken by the priestly families under investigation and presumably represented their primary vernacular. What was the status of Babylonian during the increasingly bilingual long sixth century, and what did it signify in the identity formation of the Neo-Babylonian priests and the urban elite in general? These questions, incredibly difficult, are intimately linked to the use of cuneiform script discussed above and can in fact only be answered through the agency of the written word.

We have seen throughout this study that the priestly families from Borsippa recorded their business in cuneiform. The composition of these priestly archives, like the archives of non-priestly families, comprises a wide (if not the entire) range of legal administrative genres; from property deeds and intimate family documents like marriage agreements, adoptions and inheritance divisions, to more ephemeral records such as debt notes, receipts and administrative memoranda, and of course letters[919] – proof, in my opinion, that these old-stock Babylonian families aimed for a wholesale adoption of cuneiform as well as Babylonian, the language they spoke at home and presumably within their immediate social milieu. This custom – expressed through a communal and very conservative naming practice – was intrinsically linked to the scribal education that was pursued by these traditional families as outlined above. In the course of their education students learned how to read and draw up documents and came into contact with the masterpieces of the Akkadian literature, which proclaimed the central concepts, symbols and values of Babylonian culture.[920] Moreover, some of the more advanced esoteric texts were classified as 'restricted' (*niširtu*) or 'secret' (*pirišti*) and were thought to have held a type of knowledge of which the dissemination should be restricted to the initiated only. [921] Possession of such documents and knowledge was undoubtedly a source of great pride but at the same time boosted the prestige of cuneiform culture and the Babylonian language, which

[918] E.g. Kutscher 2007: 352ff., Healey 2014: 398f.

[919] Cf. Jursa 2005: 9-49, for the various text types and genre found in the administrative archives of first millennium Babylonia.

[920] While mostly written in Babylonian, education was intrinsically linked to Sumerian, a far older but not less native language. For the use of Sumerian in the scribal education, see Gesche 2000, *passim*.

[921] Beaulieu 1992, Lenzi 2008 (especially Ch. 1).

was not only ancient and very rich in literary traditions but also offered the key to understanding cosmic truths and the fundamental mechanisms of the universe. Needless to say, Babylonian was also the language of the religious institutions. The large temple archives of the Ebabbar in Sippar and Eanna in Uruk bear witness to the fact that cuneiform formed the major backbone of temple management, and was used for both internal administration as well as external communication.[922] It stands to reason that Babylonian was also the official language of the temple assembly (*kiništu*), a hallmark that must have set it apart from other more inclusive civic assemblies (*puhru*) where Aramaic may have been more admissible. Even if Aramaic was gaining a foothold in the temple as an (auxiliary) administrative language, a quick look at the ritual texts from first millennium Uruk and Babylon reveals that cult and festivals remained exclusively Babylonian.[923] As such the public festivals can be identified as an important locus at which Babylonian was being promulgated as the language of religion and prestige. Most pompous of all was the New Year (*akītu*) festival held in Babylon. Staged in the streets of the capital and its countryside, the general public got the chance to witness a series of spectacular processions, offerings, rituals and prayers, performed by the priests, the king and the gods. Indeed hearing the public recitation of the Epic of Creation, the Babylonian-speaking audience will not have failed to notice that they, in fact, were speaking the very same language that Marduk used to shape and create their universe.[924]

I have already alluded to the fact that cuneiform, and by extension Babylonian as a language, was not only cultivated in the concealed domains of the temple but also actively promoted on the official state level. The Neo-Babylonian kings adopted this medium for the communication of the royal ideology, stressing their role as protectors and providers of the temples, teachers of native wisdom, and anointed champions of Babylonian civilisation.[925] This was done most effectively by commissioning (building) inscriptions, written in the contemporary as well as in a more archaising

[922] E.g. Jursa 2007, Jursa 2011: 193-198.

[923] E.g. Thureau-Dangin 1921, Çağirgan & Lambert 1991, Linssen 2004. All prayers, recitation, salutations, incantations, etc. found in these ritual (prescriptive) texts are either in Akkadian or in Sumerian.

[924] See Edwards 2009: 103ff. for a sociological interpretation of similar sentiments found in early Jewish (Hebrew), Syriac (Aramaic), and Islamic (Arabic) traditions. He also includes more modern parallels from Israel, Ireland and Scotland among others.

[925] See also fn. 878, above.

monumental cuneiform script, which were put up in the old Babylonian towns but also in recently subdued regions in the West – the rock reliefs such as those at Wadi Brisa in Lebanon being a good example.[926] Hence, under the patronage of these ambitious royal houses, cuneiform and the native Babylonian languages were being employed in the imperial ideology.[927] This ideological program is even more remarkable considering the 'non-Babylonian' background of the Neo-Babylonian kings. Nevertheless, the notion that these rulers fully embraced the Babylonian urban culture and its traditional religious constitution is reinforced by the fact that they all bore Babylonian names, usually commemorating Marduk or his son Nabû, the principal and most popular Babylonian gods respectively.[928] One can perceive, in the words of P. -A. Beaulieu, 'a very clear political will to impose the old civilisation of Sumer and Akkad and traditional cuneiform learning as the sole official culture of Babylonia' (2006: 208).

This also implies that participation in Babylonian (high) society required a degree of acculturation from the outsider's point of view. And our sources seem to indicate that this is exactly what happened. The adoption of Babylonian customs by Aramaic-speaking groups can be observed most clearly in naming practice. The great majority of the official Aramaic scribes (*sepīrus*) – before the fall of the Babylonian empire typically members of the royal administration – bore Babylonian names.[929] The fact that we are not dealing with Babylonians who learned Aramaic, but rather with native Arameans who offered their services and know-how to the state might be drawn from YOS 3 19, a now famous letter from the Eanna temple in Uruk recently discussed by M. Jursa (2012). In this emotional correspondence written in Babylonian by the royal commissioner (*bēl piqitti*) Nabû-ahu-iddin, the latter describes his nerve-racking circumstances to the chief temple administrator (*šatammu*) of Eanna inserting in the heat of the moment the Aramaic curse 'by the gods!' (*ba-'elāhīn*). Nabû-ahu-iddin is

[926] Da Riva 2012. Though note that the self-representation of Nebuchadnezzar II in these twin-inscriptions, in contrast to the iconographic language of Neo-Babylonian kingship, harks to some extend back to Neo-Assyrian precedents, cf. Da Riva 2010a.

[927] Even though Aramaic was probably used as a practical administrative language in the royal administration, cf. Jursa 2014a.

[928] Da Riva 2010b.

[929] Jursa 2012 and Beaulieu 2006: 194.

presumably switching back to his native tongue in a moment of great perturbation.[930] While this is only one case of code-switching which, admittedly, does not even deal with a *sepīru*-scribe, it is a clear example of an official of Aramaic (or at least bilingual) background who had assimilated fully into Babylonian culture. Working for the king of Babylon in a Babylonian religious institution, he bore a Babylonian name and wrote his letters (mostly) in Babylonian. It should also serve as a reminder, indeed a warning, that many more 'non-Babylonians' remain hidden behind conventional Babylonian names in the equally conventional cuneiform documentation. In fact the Bible tells us as much in the Book of Daniel 1: 5-7. After having learned the local language[931] and studied its script for three years in order to serve at the royal court, Daniel and his companions receive new Babylonian names – from now on Daniel would be known as Belteshazzar, or rather, Bēl-šarra-uṣur in the cuneiform sources.[932] Although circumstantial, this evidence suggests that the Babylonian culture was the dominant culture in the region, and that 'ethnic' groups felt encouraged to adopt Babylonian names and even master the Babylonian language and traditional script in order to pursue a career in the civic or royal institution.[933]

Be that as it may, for the old-stock urban families speaking Babylonian not only symbolised their affiliation to a specific and socially dominant language community, but it also nurtured a sense of continuity with the past as the language formed an important aspect of their ancestry. By the sixth century, Babylonian boasted a long and esteemed history that went back to at least the late third millennium BCE and the famed Sargonic kings. It had become the primary language of the temple and its native religion and gave rise to an extensive literary corpus. Certainly no less significant was the large body of (astral and terrestrial) science,[934] which would be among the most acclaimed intellectual traditions in later antiquity, especially known

[930] Jursa 2012: 380f.

[931] Note, however, that the Bible speaks of the Chaldean language rather than Babylonian.

[932] A similar naming practice is found among Judean (and other) deportees in Babylonia who often adopted Babylonian names, too, cf. Beaulieu 2011, Pearce [*forthcoming*], and Tolini [*forthcoming*].

[933] The fact that the Chaldean and Aramean leaders also tried to approach Babylonian urban society on a socio-political level could be deduced from the marriage alliances between their daughters and prominent local priests (see Ch. 1.1).

[934] E.g. Beaulieu 2005, Robson 2011.

for its astronomical and astrological findings.[935] Babylonian was a language worthy of the gods and ambitiously adopted by their representatives on earth, the Babylonian kings. Even if Aramaic was gaining ground as an administrative and vernacular language, Babylonian retained much of its high status as a vehicle of native culture and traditions. All this can hardly have escaped the mind of the priests, who, in fact, were the propagators of the Babylonian language and its written tradition, and contributed to their survival (at least in written form) until the beginning of our era.

It is a long-established fact that the language we use forms an important part of our sense of who we are, i.e. our identity.[936] Moreover, language throughout history has functioned as an important marker of group membership.[937] Accordingly, for the priestly families under investigation, Babylonian represented not only an instrumental tool (e.g. private record keeping), but also fulfilled a symbolic function as an emblem of groupness.

Conclusion

In the previous pages I tried to reconstruct the social identity of the Babylonian priests and their intimate circles by pinpointing and contextualising various elements that may have played a defining role in shaping their collective image. Identity is a fluid concept that is situationally contingent, multi-layered, constantly negotiated, and (re)produced through contact with significant others.[938] Even if social anthropologists have therefore shifted their analytical study away from the contents of identity to the boundaries of identity, in this chapter I made an attempt to piece together the so-called 'cultural stuff' that fostered a sense of collective identity among Babylonian priest and their fellow families.

A fundamental element in the social organisation of the families under investigation was the *bīt-abi* or 'house of the father'. Besides the notion of the

[935] E.g. Gesche 2000: 32-35, Rochberg 2004: 21, 44-45, Rochberg 2010: 143-165, Steele 2011.

[936] E.g. Chambers 1995: 250ff. For a very readable introduction into the relationship between identity and language, incorporating a very rich variety of modern as well as historical examples, and discussing both past approaches and future research prospects, readers are referred to Edwards 2009 (including a glossary of key terms and an extensive bibliography).

[937] E.g. Chambers 1995: 251, Lamont & Molnár 2002: 185, Eriksen 2002, *passim* and Edwards 2009, *passim*.

[938] E.g. Jenkins 2008, Schwartz *et al.* 2011.

paternal house as a social unit of brotherhood, it was intrinsically linked to specific property, which served as its basis of existence and over which it retained the right of redemption. As such the *bīt-abi* inspired a sense of solidarity and emotional attachment among its members; it embodied a concrete locus of togetherness and shared identity, and represented a core feature around which much of their domestic and professional lives revolved.

However, with regard to a collective identity shared by a larger social group, the *bīt-abi* takes up a somewhat ambiguous position. On the one hand, membership into specific paternal houses will have undermined rather than strengthened the basis for such a collective identity, as it fostered an attitude of solidarity and togetherness on a much lower level, geared towards one's immediate relatives. Under the influence of *bīt-abi*s, corporate kin-groups were thus effectively divided into smaller, discrete units based on close kinship. On the other hand, the transmission and distribution of important pieces of property like houses, land and prebends, as well as scribal knowledge among the individual members of the *bīt-abi* ensured that they were all equipped with the necessary means to participate in the social discourse of the elite and to uphold a corresponding identity. Even if this was not its primary aim, one can conclude that the institution of *bīt-abi*, or rather their collective efforts, paved the way for a collective identity to materialise and be maintained in the community.

There can be no doubt that the core of what might be called a priestly identity found expression through the prebendary system. Ownership of priestly titles was of key importance to the self-image of the families concerned, since they gave ritually fit members access to the sanctified space of the temple. While most of their time and energy was put into perpetuating this daily worship in the sanctuary – and thereby effectively preserving the cosmic order – there were multiple occasions at which priests could broadcast their privileged position and collective identity to the outside world. Besides (bodily) markers of purity that were visible more or less permanently, priests distinguished themselves in the community by contributing to prestigious building projects and partaking in the temple assembly (*kiništu*). However, the most ostentatious display of a collective priestly identity materialised during public festivals. It was at these religious events that the priests emerged from the sacred enclosure to lead the liturgy into the open, while supervising and participating in spectacular processions alongside the gods. As the immediate servants of the gods, priests not only enjoyed physical proximity to the divine statues but were also granted

unique access to the person of the king. Together, god, king, and priest were bound in a delicate relationship of worship and power.

While priestly families efficiently monopolised membership of the Babylonian priesthood, this was not the case for other aspects of their social identity, like the ownership of land, urban housing, literacy, and language. These domains saw the participation of a much larger section of (elite) society, and embodied a social, economic and cultural repertoire in which priestly and non-priestly families had an equal stake. The traditional naming pattern of *hanšû* land, for example, clearly revealed that priestly as well as 'secular' families benefitted from the eighth century BCE land schemes. The ownership of land provided the beneficiary families with a solid basis of subsistence and it is not surprising that it became an important landmark in the collective historical consciousness of later generations, recorded in, for example, sixth century chronicle-writings.

Despite the fact that the distribution of land among upper stratum families across the board will have led to occasional frictions and rivalry in the community, I prefer to see it as a unifying factor. Owning land in the local countryside meant that these families shared very similar responsibilities and concerns, which, at least as much as competition, engendered cooperation. Hence, rather than directly contracting lower-stratum tenants for the management of their landholdings, priestly families from Borsippa relied predominantly on individuals from within their own social stratum as lessors of their land. Landed property allowed elite families to lay claim to a very specific share in the local landscape and to participate in their collective history. This will have turned the native urban elite families into a powerful interest group that shared similar concerns, values and presumably political aspirations, too.

The same stands for urban residential property. While it is likely that priestly families occupied large parts of the neighbourhoods surrounding the temple area, they were not the only residents in Borsippa. One can be virtually certain that most, if not all well-to-do families owned a house in the city. While the reason for this was certainly practical in nature – city walls offered protection against attackers from outside – living in town also had significant ideological implications. It inspired a sense of communal affiliation, which united the citizens on the basis of political identity and local belonging. It stands to reason that living in town, if not the actual ownership of a town house, facilitated admittance into this socio-political entity and enabled individuals to enjoy its communal rights and privileges. Needles to say, not

only priests, but the urban upper stratum at large can be identified as the Babylonian citizens (*mār-banê* or short, *māru*). They wielded much of the local political power through neighbourhood connections, interlocking networks of patronage, the participation in various civic assemblies, and, most conspicuously, by filling the highest legal-administrative posts like that of chief temple administrator (*šatammu*) and city governor (*šākin-tēmi*).

Besides comparable property portfolios, a shared sense of historical consciousness and local belonging, and similar political aspirations, priestly and non-priestly families were further linked through scribal education. While it stands to reason that compared to the rest of society, temple-based families strived for a more advanced level of literacy, they certainly did not hold a monopoly on education, which was open to a much wider (non-priestly) segment of society. Pupils of both priestly and non-priestly backgrounds were thus being familiarised and instilled with the fundamental concepts, symbols and values of Babylonian (high) culture in the course of their scribal training. Even if there is no proof that literacy was a precondition to operate in high society, being at least functionally literate gave an individual more independence and might even have opened doors to more prestigious civic functions. Participation in the 'official' cuneiform culture nurtured an *esprit de corps* among the literati, and represented a vehicle through which the native urban elites were able to reproduce and consolidate their dominant and privileged position in local society.

Together with the adoption of the cuneiform script, these old-stock Babylonian families also shared the same native Babylonian language. This transpires from the distinct and shared onomasticon and the fact that their archives include a wide range of genres. Moreover, that it was actively spoken is supported by linguistic innovations found in the texts themselves. The use of Babylonian is an important feature of their collective identity for it clearly set these urban elite families apart from other segments of society, in which Aramaic (and other non-native languages) was presumably more common or even standard. Since at least the beginning of the first millennium BCE, the region between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates witnessed a process of Aramaisation. This language would eventually become the predominant vernacular of Iraq at the turn of the millennium.

It is against this linguistic landscape that one should see the use of cuneiform and the native Babylonian language by priestly and other urban elite families. It is likely that for them speaking Babylonian symbolised affiliation to a specific community. It

will have nurtured a sense of continuity with the past, as the language formed an important aspect of their ancestry. Even if Aramaic was gaining ground, Babylonian retained much of its status as a vehicle of native culture and traditions, and as a language with legal authority. What is more, the fact that groups other than the old-stock Babylonians adopted traditional Babylonian names and mastered the traditional script in order to pursue a career in the civic or royal institution suggests that Babylonian and cuneiform writing still represented the dominant culture in the urban milieu of the long sixth century.

Once we integrate these findings with the concepts of homophily and social boundary, which formed our point of departure, the following picture could be drawn. For the social formation of the group that stands at the core of this study, the priestly families from Borsippa, membership to the priesthood, or, more generally, the affiliation to the temple and the concerns of ritual purity that came with it was a major deciding factor. Seeing that the majority *and* the most significant types of interactions materialised within the circle of temple-related families, one can safely conclude that this represented their primary in-group. However it goes without saying that beyond their affiliation to this social circle and the temple institution, priests were an integral part of the much wider and more diverse urban community, from which they should not be detached even if the one-sided documentation gives little evidence of interaction. A Babylonian priest was not only a devoted servant of the gods, but also a landholder, a town-dweller and a literatus versed in the cuneiform lore. He also spoke Babylonian and had legal responsibilities and political aspirations for the sake of his family, his fellow citizens and his community at large. This multiplex socio-economic repertoire with which Babylonian priests associated themselves, the so-called cultural stuff, was shared with a much wider, primarily elite, section of society. Here we touch very much on the grey area of the social boundary – who was in and who was out? While impossible to answer with certainty, this question can best be approached from a practical point of view through a close investigation of the actual interactional patterns, which is at the heart of this investigation. On a conceptual level, the principle of homophily poses that similarity leads to interaction. Hence, the more one's symbolic attributes and material resources corresponded to the social identity claimed by and assigned to Babylonian priests the more likely it was to be drawn into their exclusive and carefully shielded social world.